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LUCRETIA

OR

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RIENZI."

ETC. ETC.

"DOVE IL SOL TACE."

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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1846.

EPILOGUE TO PART THE FIRST.

It is a year since the November day on which Lucretia Clavering quitted the roof of Mr. Fielden. And first we must recall the eye of the reader to the old-fashioned terrace at Laughton; the jutting porch, the quaint balustrades, the broad, dark, changeless cedars on the lawn beyond. The day is calm, clear and mild, for November in the country is often a gentle month. On that terrace walked Charles Vernon, now known by his new name of St. John. Is it the change of name that has so changed the person? Can the wand of the Herald's Office have filled up the hollows of the cheek, and replaced by elastic vigour, the listless languor of the tread? No; there is another and a better cause for that healthful change. Mr. Vernon St. John is not alone—a fair companion

leans on his arm. See, she pauses to press closer to his side, gaze on his face, and whisper, "We did well to have hope and faith!"

The husband's faith had not been so unshaken as his Mary's, and a slight blush passed over his cheek as he thought of his concession to Sir Miles's wishes, and his overtures to Lucretia Clavering. Still that fault had been fairly acknowledged to his wife, and she felt, the moment she had spoken, that she had committed an indiscretion; nevertheless, with an arch touch of womanly malice, she added softly,—

"And Miss Clavering, you persist in saying, was not really handsome?"

"My love," replied the husband, gravely, "you would oblige me by not recalling the very painful recollections connected with that name. Let it never be mentioned in this house."

Lady Mary bowed her graceful head in submission—she understood Charles's feelings. For though he had not shown her Sir Miles's letter and its enclosure, he had communicated enough to account for the unexpected heritage, and to lessen his wife's compassion for the disappointed heiress. Nevertheless, she comprehended that

her husband felt an uneasy twinge at the idea that he was compelled to act hardly to the one whose hopes he had supplanted. Lucretia's banishment from Laughton was a just humiliation, but it humbled a generous heart to inflict the sentence. Thus, on all accounts, the remembrance of Lucretia was painful and unwelcome to the successor of Sir Miles. There was a silence—Lady Mary pressed her husband's hand.

“It is strange,” said he, giving vent to his thoughts at that tender sign of sympathy in his feeling—“strange that, after all, she did not marry Mainwaring, but fixed her choice on that supple Frenchman. But she has settled abroad now, perhaps for life—a great relief to my mind. Yes, let us never recur to her.”

“Fortunately,” said Lady Mary, with some hesitation, “she does not seem to have created much interest here. The poor seldom name her to me, and our neighbours only with surprise at her marriage. In another year she will be forgotten!”

Mr. St. John sighed. Perhaps he felt how much more easily he had been forgotten, were he the banished one, Lucretia the possessor! His light

nature, however, soon escaped from all thoughts and sources of annoyance, and he listened with complacent attention to Lady Mary's gentle plans for the poor, and the children's school, and the cottages that ought to be repaired, and the labourers that ought to be employed. For, though it may seem singular, Vernon St. John, insensibly influenced by his wife's meek superiority, and corrected by her pure companionship, had begun to feel the charm of innocent occupations ;—more, perhaps, than if he had been accustomed to the larger and loftier excitements of life, and missed that stir of intellect which is the element of those who have warred in the democracy of letters, or contended for the leadership of states. He had begun already to think that the country was no such exile after all. Naturally benevolent, he had taught himself to share the occupations his Mary had already found in the busy 'luxury of doing good,' and to conceive that brotherhood of charity which usually unites the lord of the village with its poor.

“ I think, what with hunting once a week,—(I will not venture more till my pain in the side is quite gone,)—and with the help of some old

friends at Christmas, we can get through the winter very well, Mary."

"Ah, those old friends! I dread them more than the hunting!"

"But we'll have your grave father, and your dear, precise, excellent mother, to keep us in order. And if I sit more than half an hour after dinner, the old butler shall pull me out by the ears. Mary, what do you say to thinning the grove yonder? We shall get a better view of the landscape beyond. No, hang it! dear old Sir Miles loved his trees better than the prospect—I won't lop a bough. But that avenue we are planting will be certainly a noble improvement——"

"Fifty years hence, Charles!"

"It is our duty to think of posterity," answered the *ci-devant* spendthrift, with a gravity that was actually pompous. "But hark? is that two o'clock? Three, by Jove! How time flies! and my new bullocks that I was to see at two! Come down to the farm, that's my own Mary. Ah, your fine ladies are not such bad housewives after all!"

"And your fine gentlemen——"

"Capital farmers! I had no idea till last week that a prize ox was so interesting an animal

One lives to learn. Put me in mind, by-the-bye, to write to Coke about his sheep."

"This way, dear Charles; we can go round by the village, and see poor Ponto and Dash."

The tears rushed to Mr. St. John's eyes. "If poor Sir Miles could have known you!" he said, with a sigh; and, though the gardeners were at work on the lawn, he bowed his head, and kissed the blushing cheek of his wife as heartily as if he had been really a farmer.

From the terrace at Laughton, turn to the humbler abode of our old friend the Vicar—the same day, the same hour. Here also the scene is without doors—we are in the garden of the vicarage; the children are playing at hide and seek amongst the espaliers, which screen the winding gravel walks from the esculents more dear to Ceres than to Flora. The Vicar is seated in his little parlour, from which a glazed door admits into the garden. The door is now open, and the good man has paused from his work (he had just discovered a new emendation in the first chorus of the *Medea*,) to look out at the rosy faces that gleam to and fro across the scene. His wife, with a basket in her hand, is standing without

the door, but a little aside, not to obstruct the view.

“ It does one’s heart good to see them !” said the vicar ; “ little dears !”

“ Yes, they ought to be dear at this time of the year,” observed Mrs. Fielden, who was absorbed in the contents of the basket.

“ And so fresh !”

“ Fresh, indeed !—how different from London ! In London they were not fit to be seen ; as old as—I am sure I can’t guess how old they were. But you see here they are new laid every morning !”

“ My dear !” said Mr. Fielden, opening his eyes—“ new laid every morning !”

“ Two dozen and four.”

“ Two dozen and four !—What on earth are you talking about, Mrs. Fielden ?”

“ Why the eggs to be sure, my love !”

“ Oh !” said the Vicar, “ two dozen and four !—you alarmed me a little ; ’tis of no consequence—only my foolish mistake. Always prudent and saving, my dear Sarah ; just as if poor Sir Miles had not left us that munificent fortune, I may call it.”

“ It will not go very far when we have our

young ones to settle. And—David is very extravagant already: he has torn such a hole in his jacket!”

At this moment, up the gravel walk, two young persons came in sight. The children darted across them, whooping and laughing, and vanished in the further recess of the garden.

“All is for the best—blind mortals that we are!—all is for the best!” said the Vicar, musingly, as his eyes rested upon the approaching pair.

“Certainly, my love; you are always right, and it is wicked to grumble. *Still*, if you saw what a hole it was—past patching, I fear!”

“Look round!” said Mr. Fielden, benevolently. “How we grieved for them both; how wroth we were with William—how sad for Susan! And now see them—they will be the better man and wife for their trial!”

“Has Susan then consented? I was almost afraid she never would consent. How often have I been almost angry with her, poor lamb! when I have heard her accuse herself of causing her sister’s unhappiness, and declare with sobs that she felt it a crime to think of William Mainwaring as a husband.”

“ I trust I have reasoned her out of a morbid sensibility, which, while it could not have rendered Lucretia the happier, must have ensured the wretchedness of herself and William. But if Lucretia had not married, and so for ever closed the door on William’s repentance, (that is, supposing he *did* repent,) I believe poor Susan would rather have died of a broken heart, than have given her hand to Mainwaring.”

“ It was an odd marriage of that proud young lady’s, after all,” said Mrs. Fielden; “ so much older than her—a foreigner, too!”

“ But he is a very pleasant man, and they had known each other so long. I did not, however, quite like a sort of cunning he showed, when I came to reflect on it, in bringing Lucretia back to the house; it looks as if he had laid a trap for her from the first.”

“ Ten thousand pounds!—a great catch for a foreigner!” observed Mrs. Fielden, with the *naïve* instinct of her sex; and then she added, in the spirit of a prudent sympathy equally characteristic: “ But I think you say Mr. Parchmount persuaded her to allow half to be settled on herself. That will be a hold on him.”

"A bad hold, if that be all, Sarah. There is a better—he is a learned man, and a scholar. Scholars are naturally domestic, and make good husbands."

"But you know he must be a papist!" said Mrs. Fielden.

"Umph!" muttered the Vicar, irresolutely.

While the worthy couple were thus conversing, Susan and her lover, not having finished their conference, had turned back through the winding walk.

"Indeed," said William, drawing her arm closer to his side, "these scruples—these fears—are cruel to me as well as to yourself. If you were no longer existing, I could be nothing to your sister. Nay, even were she not married, you must know enough of her pride to be assured that I can retain no place in her affections. What has chanced was not our crime. Perhaps Heaven designed to save, not only us, but herself, from the certain misery of nuptials so inauspicious!"

"If she would but answer one of my letters!" sighed Susan; "or if I could but know that she were happy and contented!"

"Your letters must have miscarried—you are

not sure even of her address. Rely upon it she is happy. Do you think that she would, a second time ‘have stooped beneath her’—Mainwaring’s lip writhed as he repeated that phrase—“if her feelings had not been involved? I would not wrong your sister—I shall ever feel gratitude for the past, and remorse for my own shameful weakness—still I must think that the nature of her attachment to me, was more ardent than lasting.”

“Ah, William! how can you know her heart?”

“By comparing it with yours. Oh, there, indeed, I may anchor my faith! Susan, we were formed for each other! Our natures are alike—save that yours, despite its surpassing sweetness, has greater strength in its simple candour. You will be my guide to good. Without you I should have no aim in life—no courage to front the contests of this world. Ah, this hand trembles still!”

“William, William, I cannot repress a foreboding—a superstition! At night, I am haunted with that pale face, as I saw it last,—pale with suppressed despair. Oh, if ever Lucretia could have need of us—need of our services, our affections—if we could but repair the grief we have caused her!”

Susan's head sank on her lover's shoulder. She had said "need of *us*"—"need of *our* services." In those simple monosyllables the union was pledged—the identity of their lots in the dark urn was implied.

From this scene turn again—the slide shifts in the lantern—we are at Paris. In the ante-chamber at the Tuilleries, a crowd of expectant courtiers and adventurers gaze upon a figure who passes with modest and downcast eyes through the throng; he has just left the closet of the First Consul.

"*Par Dieu!*" said B——, "power, like misery, makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows. I should like to hear what the First Consul can have to say to Olivier Dalibard."

Fouché, who at that period was scheming for the return to his old dignities as minister of police, smiled slightly, and answered, "In a time when the air is filled with daggers, one who was familiar with Robespierre has his uses. Olivier Dalibard is a remarkable man. He is one of those children of the Revolution, whom that great mother is bound to save."

"By betraying his brethren?" said B——, drily.

"I do not allow the inference. The simple fact is that Dalibard has spent many years in

England—he has married an Englishwoman of birth and connexions—he knows well the English language and English people—and just now, when the First Consul is so anxious to *approfondir* the popular feelings of that strange nation, with whose government he is compelled to go to war, he may naturally have much to say to so acute an observer as Olivier Dalibard.”

“Um !” said B—— ; “ with such patronage, Robespierre’s friend should hold his head somewhat higher !”

Meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard, crossing the gardens of the palace, took his way to the Faubourg St. Germain. There was no change in the aspect of this man ; the same meditative tranquillity characterized his downward eyes and bended brow ; the same precise simplicity of dress which had pleased the prim taste of Robespierre, gave decorum to his slender stooping form. No expression more cheerful, no footstep more elastic, bespoke the exile’s return to his native land, or the sanguine expectations of Intellect restored to a career. Yet, to all appearance, the prospects of Dalibard were bright and promising. The First Consul was at that stage of his greatness, when he sought to employ in his service all

such talent as the Revolution had made manifest—provided only, that it was not stained with notorious bloodshed, or too strongly associated with the Jacobin clubs. His quick eye seemed to have discovered already the abilities of Dalibard, and to have appreciated the sagacity and knowledge of men which had enabled this subtle person to obtain the friendship of Robespierre, without sharing in his crimes. He had been frequently closeted with Buonaparte; he was in the declared favour of Fouché, who, though not at that period at the head of the Police, was too necessary amidst the dangers of the time, deepened as they were by the rumours of some terrible and profound conspiracy, to be laid aside, as the First Consul had at one moment designed. One man alone, of those high in the State, appeared to distrust Olivier Dalibard—the celebrated Cambacères. But with his aid the Provençal could dispense. What was the secret of Dalibard's power? was it, in truth, owing solely to his native talent, and his acquired experience, especially of England?—was it by honourable means that he had won the ear of the First Consul? We may be sure of the contrary; for it is a striking attribute

of men once thoroughly tainted by the indulgence of vicious schemes and stratagems, that they become wholly blinded to those plain paths of ambition, which common sense makes manifest to ordinary ability. If we regard narrowly the lives of great criminals, we are often very much startled by the extraordinary acuteness—the profound calculation—the patient meditative energy which they have employed upon the conception and execution of a crime. We feel inclined to think that such intellectual power would have commanded great distinction, worthily used and guided; but we never find that these great criminals seem to have been sensible of the opportunities to real eminence which they have thrown away. Often we observe that there has been before them vistas into worldly greatness, which, by no uncommon prudence and exertion, would have conducted honest men, half as clever, to fame and power; but, with a strange obliquity of vision, they appear to have looked from these broad clear avenues, into some dark, tangled defile, in which, by the subtlest ingenuity, and through the most besetting perils, they may attain at last to the success of a fraud, or the enjoy-

ment of a vice. In crime once indulged, there is a wonderful fascination—and the fascination is, not rarely, great in proportion to the intellect of the criminal. There is always hope of reform for a dull, uneducated, stolid man, led by accident or temptation into guilt; but where a man of great ability, and highly educated, besots himself in the intoxication of dark and terrible excitements, takes impure delight in tortuous and slimy ways, the good angel abandons him for ever.

Olivier Dalibard walked musingly on—gained a house in one of the most desolate quarters of the abandoned Faubourg, mounted the spacious stairs, and rang at the door of an attic next the roof. After some moments, the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and two small fierce eyes, peering through a mass of black tangled curls, gleamed through the aperture. The gaze seemed satisfactory.

“Enter, friend,” said the inmate, with a sort of complacent grunt; and, as Dalibard obeyed, the man reclosed, and barred the door.

The room was bare to beggary,—the ceiling, low and sloping, was blackened with smoke. A

wretched bed, two chairs, a table, a strong chest, a small cracked looking-glass, completed the inventory. The dress of the occupier was not in keeping with the chamber;—true that it was not such as was worn by the wealthier classes, but it betokened no sign of poverty. A blue coat, with high collar, and half of military fashion, was buttoned tight over a chest of vast girth; the nether garments were of leather, scrupulously clean, and solid, heavy riding boots came half way up the thigh. A more sturdy, stalwart, strong-built knave, never excited the admiration which physical power always has a right to command: And Dalibard gazed on him with envy. The pale scholar absolutely sighed as he thought—what an auxiliary to his own scheming mind would have been so tough a frame!

But even less in form than face did the man of thews and sinews contrast the man of wile and craft. Opposite that high forehead, with its massive development of organs, scowled the low front of one to whom thought was unfamiliar—protuberant, indeed, over the shaggy brows, where phrenologists place the seats of practical perception—strongly marked in some of the brutes, as in

the dog—but almost literally void of those higher organs, by which we reason, and imagine, and construct. But in rich atonement for such deficiency, all the animal reigned triumphant in the immense mass and width of the skull behind. And as the hair, long before, curled in close rings to the nape of the bull-like neck, you saw before you one of those useful instruments to ambition and fraud, which recoil at no danger, comprehend no crime, are not without certain good qualities, under virtuous guidance,—for they have the fidelity, the obedience, the stubborn courage of the animal; but which, under evil control, turn those very qualities to unsparing evil—bull-dogs to rend the foe, as bull-dogs to defend the master.

For some moments the two men gazed silently at each other. At length, Dalibard said, with an air of calm superiority——

“My friend, it is time that I should be presented to the chiefs of your party!”

“Chiefs, *par tous les diables*!” growled the other; “we *Chouans* are all chiefs, when it comes to blows. You have seen my credentials; you know that I am a man to be trusted; what more do you need?”

“For myself nothing ; but my friends are more scrupulous. I have sounded, as I promised, the heads of the old Jacobin party—and they are favourable. This upstart soldier, who has suddenly seized in his iron grasp all the fruits of the Revolution, is as hateful to them as to you. But, *que voulez vous, mon cher*—men are men ! It is one thing to destroy Buonaparte ; it is another thing to restore the Bourbons. How can the Jacobin chiefs depend on your assurance, or my own, that the Bourbons will forget the old offences, and reward the new service. You apprise me, so do your credentials, that a Prince of the blood is engaged in this enterprise, that he will appear at the proper season. Put me in direct communication with this representative of the Bourbons, and I promise in return, if his assurances are satisfactory, that you shall have an *émeute* to be felt from Paris to Marseilles. If you cannot do this, I am useless ; and I withdraw——”

“Withdraw ! *Garde à vous—Monsieur le Savant !* No man withdraws alive from a conspiracy like ours.”

We have said before that Olivier Dalibard was not physically brave ; and the look of the *Chouan*,

as those words were said, would have frozen the blood of many a bolder man. But the habitual hypocrisy of Dalibard enabled him to disguise his fear, and he replied, drily :

“ *Monsieur le Chouan*,—it is not by threats that you will gain adherents to a desperate cause, which, on the contrary, requires mild words and flattering inducements. If you commit a violence—a murder—*mon cher*—Paris is not Bretagne ; we have a police ; you will be discovered.”

“ Ha, ha !—what then ?—do you think I fear the guillotine ?”

“ For yourself—no ; but for your leaders—yes ! If you are discovered, and arrested for crime, do you fancy that the Police will not recognise the right arm of the terrible George Cadoudal ?—that they will not guess that Cadoudal is at Paris ?—that Cadoudal will not accompany you to the guillotine ?”

The *Chouan's* face fell. Olivier watched him, and pursued his advantage.

“ I asked you to introduce to me this shadow of a prince, under which you would march to a counter-revolution. But I will be more easily contented. Present me to George Cadoudal, the

hero of Morbihan ; he is a man in whom I can trust, and with whom I can deal. What!—you hesitate?—How do you suppose enterprises of this nature can be carried on? If, from fear and distrust of each other, the man you would employ cannot meet the chief who directs him, there will be delay—confusion—panic,—and you will all perish by the executioner. And for me, Pierre Guillot, consider my position : I am in some favour with the First Consul—I have a station of respectability—a career lies before me. Can you think that I will hazard these, with my head to boot, like a rash child? Do you suppose that, in entering into this terrible contest, I would consent to treat only with subordinates? Do not deceive yourself. Again, I say, tell your employers that they must confer with me directly, or *je m'en lave les mains*.”

“I will repeat what you say,” answered Guillot, sullenly. “Is this all?”

“All for the present,” said Dalibard, slowly drawing on his gloves, and retreating towards the door. The *Chouan* watched him with a suspicious and sinister eye; and as the Provençal’s hand was on the latch, he laid his own rough grasp on Dalibard’s shoulder—

“I know not how it is, Monsieur Dalibard, but I mistrust you.”

“Distrust is natural and prudent to all who conspire,” replied the scholar, quietly. “I do not ask you to confide in me—your employers bade you seek me—I have mentioned my conditions—let them decide.”

“You carry it off well, Monsieur Dalibard. And I am under a solemn oath, which poor George made me take, knowing me to be a hot-headed, honest fellow—*mauvaise tête*, if you will—that I will keep my hand off pistol and knife upon mere suspicion—that nothing less than his word or than clear and positive proof of treachery shall put me out of good humour and into warm blood. But bear this with you, Monsieur Dalibard, if I once discover that you use our secrets to betray them,—should George see you, and one hair of his head come to injury through *your* hands, I will wring your neck as a good wife wrings a pullet’s.”

“I don’t doubt your strength or your ferocity, Pierre Guillot; but my neck will be safe; you have enough to do to take care of your own—*au revoir*.”

With a tone and look of calm and fearless irony, the scholar thus spoke and left the room;

but when he was on the stairs, he paused, and caught at the balustrade—the sickness as of terror at some danger past, or to be, came over him ; and this contrast between the self-command, or simulation which belongs to moral courage, and the feebleness of natural and constitutional cowardice, would have been sublime if shown in a noble cause. In one so corrupt, it but betrayed a nature doubly formidable ; for treachery and murder hatch their brood amidst the folds of a hypocrite's cowardice.

While thus the interview between Dalibard and the conspirator,—we must bestow a glance upon the Provençal's home.

In an apartment in one of the principal streets, between the Boulevards and the Rue St. Honoré, a boy and a woman sate side by side, conversing in whispers. The boy was Gabriel Varney, the woman Lucretia Dalibard. The apartment was furnished in the then modern taste which affected classical forms ; and though not without a certain elegance, had something meagre and comfortless in its slender tripods and thin-legged chairs. There was in the apartment that air which bespeaks the struggle for appearances—that struggle familiar

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with those of limited income, and vain aspirings, who want the taste which smoothes all inequalities, and gives a smile to home—that taste which affection seems to prompt, if not to create—which shows itself in a thousand nameless, costless trifles, each a grace. No sign was there of the household cares or industry of women. No flowers, no music, no embroidery frame, no work-table. Lucretia had none of the sweet feminine habits which betray so lovelily the whereabouts of women. All was formal and precise, like rooms which we enter and leave—not those in which we settle and dwell.

Lucretia herself is changed, her air is more assured, her complexion more pale, the evil character of her mouth more firm and pronounced.

Gabriel, still a mere boy in years, has a premature look of man. The down shades his lips. His dress, though showy and theatrical, is no longer that of boyhood. His rounded cheek has grown thin, as with the care and thought which beset the anxious step of youth on entering into life.

Both, as before remarked, spoke in whispers;—both from time to time glanced fearfully at the door; both felt that they belonged to a hearth

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round which smile not the jocund graces of trust and love, and the heart's open ease.

"But," said Gabriel—"but if you would be safe, my father must have no secrets hid from you."

"I do not know that he has. He speaks to me frankly of his hopes—of the share he has in the discovery of the plot against the First Consul—of his interviews with Pierre Guillot, the Breton."

"Ah, because *there* your courage supports him, and your acuteness assists his own. Such secrets belong to his public life—his political schemes—with those he will trust you. It is his private life—his private projects you must know."

"But what does he conceal from me? Apart from politics, his whole mind seems bent on the very natural object of securing the intimacy with his rich cousin, Monsieur Bellanger, from whom he has a right to expect so large an inheritance."

"Bellanger is rich, but he is not much older than my father."

"He has bad health."

"No," said Gabriel, with a downcast eye and a strange smile—"he has not bad health, but he may not be long lived."

"How do you mean?" asked Lucretia, sinking her voice into a still lower whisper, while a shudder, she scarce knew why, passed over her frame.

"What does my father do," resumed Gabriel, "in that room at the top of the house? Does he tell you *that* secret?"

"He makes experiments in chemistry. You know that that was always his favourite study. You smile again! Gabriel, do not smile so; it appals me. Do you think there is some mystery in that chamber?"

"It matters not what we think, *belle mère*—it matters much what we know. If I were you, I *would* know what is in that chamber. I repeat, to be safe, you must have all his secrets or none. Hush, that is his step!"

The door handle turned noiselessly, and Olivier entered. His look fell on his son's face, which betrayed only apparent surprise at his unexpected return. He then glanced at Lucretia's, which was, as usual, cold and impenetrable.

"Gabriel," said Dalibard, gently, "I have come in for you. I have promised to take you to spend the day at Monsieur Bellanger's; you are a great favourite with Madame. Come, my boy. I shall

be back soon, Lucretia. I shall but drop in to leave Gabriel at my cousin's."

Gabriel rose cheerfully, as if only alive to the expectation of the bon-bons and compliments he received habitually from Madame Bellanger.

"And you can take your drawing implements with you," continued Dalibard. "This good Monsieur Bellanger has given you permission to copy his Poussin."

"His Poussin! Ah, *that* is placed in his bedroom,* is it not?"

"Yes," answered Dalibard, briefly.

Gabriel lifted his sharp bright eyes to his father's face. Dalibard turned away.

"Come!" he said, with some impatience; and the boy took up his hat.

In another minute, Lucretia was alone.

Alone, in an English home, is a word implying no dreary solitude to an accomplished woman; but alone in that foreign land—alone in those half furnished, desolate apartments—few books, no musical instruments, no companions during the

* It is scarcely necessary to observe that bed-chambers in Paris, when forming part of the suite of reception rooms, are often decorated no less elaborately than the other apartments.

day to drop in ;—*that* loneliness was wearing. And that mind so morbidly active ! In the old Scottish legend, the Spirit that serves the wizard must be kept constantly employed ; suspend its work for a moment, and it rends the enchanter. It is so with minds that crave for excitement, and live without relief of heart and affection, on the hard tasks of the intellect.

Lucretia mused over Gabriel's words and warning : " To be safe, you must know all his secrets or none." What was the secret which Dalibard had not communicated to her ?

She rose, stole up the cold, cheerless stairs, and ascended to the attic which Dalibard had lately hired. It was locked ; and she observed that the lock was small—so small, that the key might be worn in a ring. She descended and entered her husband's usual cabinet, which adjoined the sitting-room. All the books which the house contained were there ; a few works on metaphysics—Spinoza in especial—the great Italian histories, some volumes of statistics, many on physical and mechanical philosophy, and one or two works of biography and memoirs :—No light literature, that grace and flower of human culture—

that best philosophy of all, humanizing us with gentle art, making us wise through the humours, elevated through the passions, tender in the affections of our kind ! She took out one of the volumes that seemed less arid than the rest, for she was weary of her own thoughts, and began to read. To her surprise, the first passage she opened was singularly interesting, though the title was nothing more seductive than the "Life of a Physician of Padua, in the Sixteenth Century." It related to that singular epoch of terror in Italy, when some mysterious disease, varying in a thousand symptoms, baffled all remedy, and long defied all conjecture—a disease attacking chiefly the heads of families, father and husband—rarely women. In one city, seven hundred husbands perished, but not one wife ! The disease was poison. The hero of the memoir was one of the earlier discoverers of the true cause of this household epidemic. He had been a chief authority in a commission of inquiry. Startling were the details given in the work; the anecdotes, the histories, the astonishing craft brought daily to bear on the victim, the wondrous perfidy of the subtle means, the variation of the certain murder—here swift as epilepsy—there

slow and wasting as long decline:—the lecture was absorbing; and absorbed in the book Lucretia still was, when she heard Dalibard's voice behind; he was looking over her shoulder.

“A strange selection for so fair a student! *Enfant*, play not with such weapons!”

“But is this all true?”

“True, though scarce a fragment of the truth. The physician was a sorry chemist, and a worse philosopher. He blundered in his analysis of the means; and, if I remember rightly, he whines like a priest at the motives; for see you not what was really the cause of this spreading pestilence. It was the Saturnalia of the Weak—a burst of mocking licence against the Strong: it was more—it was the innate force of the individual waging war against the many.”

“I do not understand you.”

“No! In that age, husbands were, indeed, lords of the household: they married mere children for their lands; they neglected and betrayed them; they were inexorable if the wife committed the faults set before her example. Suddenly the wife found herself armed against her tyrant. His life was in her hands. So the weak had no mercy on

the strong! But man, too, was then, even more than now, a lonely wrestler in a crowded arena. Brute force alone gave him distinction in courts; wealth alone brought him justice in the halls, or gave him safety in his home. Suddenly, the frail, puny man saw that he could reach the mortal part of his giant foe. The noiseless sling was in his hand—it smote Goliath from afar. Suddenly, the poor man, ground to the dust, spat upon by contempt, saw through the crowd of richer kinsmen, who shunned and bade him rot—saw those whose death made him heir to lordship, and gold, and palaces, and power, and esteem! As a worm through a wardrobe, that man ate through velvet and ermine, and gnawed out the hearts that beat in his way. No! A great intellect can comprehend these criminals, and account for the crime. It is a mighty thing to feel in one's self that one is an army—more than an army! What thousands and millions of men, with trumpet and banner, and under the sanction of glory, strive to do—*destroy a foe*,—that, with little more than an effort of the will—with a drop, a grain, for all his arsenal—one man can do!”

There was a horrible enthusiasm about this

reasoning devil as he spoke thus: his crest rose, his breast expanded. That animation which a noble thought gives to generous hearts, kindled in the face of the apologist for the darkest and basest of human crimes. Lucretia shuddered; but her gloomy imagination was spelled; there was an interest mingled with her terror.

“Hush! you appal me,” she said, at last, timidly. “But, happily, this fearful art exists no more to tempt and destroy?”

“As a mere philosophical discovery, it might be amusing to a chemist to learn exactly what were the compounds of those ancient poisons,” said Dalibard, not directly answering the implied question. “Portions of the art are indeed lost, unless, as I suspect, there is much credulous exaggeration in the accounts transmitted to us. To kill by a flower, a pair of gloves, a soap ball—kill by means which elude all possible suspicion—is it credible? What say you? An amusing research, indeed, if one had leisure! But enough of this now; it grows late. We dine with Monsieur de ——. He wishes to let his hotel. Why, Lucretia, if we knew a little of this old art, *Par Dieu!* we could soon hire the hotel! Well, well,

perhaps we may survive my cousin, Jean Bellanger !”

Three days afterwards, Lucretia stood by her husband's side in the secret chamber. From the hour when she left it, a change was perceptible in her countenance, which gradually removed from it the character of youth. Paler the cheek could scarce become, nor more cold the discontented, restless eye. But it was as if some great care had settled on her brow, and contracted yet more the stern outline of the lips. Gabriel noted the alteration ; but he did not attempt to win her confidence. He was occupied rather in considering, first, if it were well for him to sound deeper into the mystery he suspected ; and, secondly, to what extent, and on what terms it became his interest to aid the designs in which, by Dalibard's hints and kindly treatment, he foresaw that he was meant to participate.

A word now on the rich kinsman of the Dalibards: Jean Bellanger had been one of those prudent republicans who had put the Revolution to profit. By birth a Marseillais,—he had settled in Paris, as an *épiciér*, about the year 1785, and had distinguished himself by the adaptability and finesse

which become those who fish in such troubled waters. He had sided with Mirabeau, next with Vergniaud, and the Girondins. These he forsook in time for Danton, whose facile corruptibility made him a seductive patron. He was a large purchaser in the sale of the emigrant property ; he obtained a contract for the supply of the army in the Netherlands ; he abandoned Danton as he had abandoned the Girondins, but without taking any active part in the after-proceedings of the Jacobins. His next connexion was with Tallien and Barras, and he enriched himself yet more under the Directory than he had done in the earlier stages of the Revolution. Under cover of an appearance of *bonhomie* and good humour, a frank laugh and open countenance, Jean Bellanger had always retained general popularity and good will ; and was one of those whom the policy of the First Consul led him to conciliate. He had long since retired from the more vulgar departments of trade, but continued to flourish as an army contractor. He had a large hotel and a splendid establishment. He was one of the great capitalists of Paris. The relationship between Dalibard and Bellanger was not very close, it was that of

cousins twice removed; and during Dalibard's previous residence at Paris, each embracing different parties, and each eager in his career, the blood-tie between them had not been much thought of, though they were good friends, and each respected the other for the discretion with which he had kept aloof from the more sanguinary excesses of the time. As Bellanger was not many years older than Dalibard, as the former had but just married in the year 1791, and had naturally before him the prospect of a family—as his fortunes at that time, though rising, were unconfirmed, and as some nearer relations stood between them, in the shape of two promising sturdy nephews, Dalibard had not then calculated on any inheritance from his cousin. On his return, circumstances were widely altered—Bellanger had been married some years, and no issue had blessed his nuptials. His nephews, draughted into the conscription, had perished in Egypt. Dalibard apparently became his nearest relative.

To avarice or to worldly ambition, there was, undoubtedly, something very dazzling in the prospect thus opened to the eyes of Olivier Dalibard. The Contractor's splendid mode of living, vying

with that of the *fermier-general* of old, the colossal masses of capital, by which he backed and supported speculations, that varied with an ingenuity rendered practical and profound by experience, inflamed into fever the morbid restlessness of fancy and intellect which characterized the evil scholar. For that restlessness seemed to supply to his nature, vices not constitutional to it. Dalibard had not the avarice that belongs either to a miser or a spendthrift. In his youth, his books and the simple desires of an abstract student sufficed to his wants, and a habit of method and order, a mechanical calculation which accompanied all his acts, from the least to the greatest—preserved him, even when most poor, from neediness and want. Nor was he by nature vain and ostentatious—those infirmities accompany a larger and more luxuriant nature. His philosophy rather despised, than inclined to, show. Yet since to plot and to scheme, made his sole amusement, his absorbing excitement,—so a man wrapped in himself, and with no generous ends in view, has little to plot or to scheme for, but objects of worldly aggrandizement. In this, Dalibard resembled one whom the intoxication of gambling

has mastered, who neither wants, nor greatly prizes, the stake, but who has grown wedded to the venture for it. It was a madness like that of a certain rich nobleman in our own country, who, with more money than he could spend, and with a skill, in all games where skill enters, that would have secured him success of itself,—having learned the art of cheating, could not resist its indulgence. No hazard, no warning, could restrain him—cheat he must—the propensity became iron-strong as a Greek destiny.

That the possible chance of an inheritance so magnificent should dazzle Lucretia and Gabriel, was yet more natural; for in them, it appealed to more direct and eloquent, though not more powerful, propensities. Gabriel had every vice which the greed of gain most irritates and excites. Intense covetousness lay at the core of his heart; he had the sensual temperament which yearns for every enjoyment, and takes pleasure in every pomp and show of life. Lucretia, with a hardness of mind that disdained luxury; and a certain grandeur, (if such a word may be applied to one so perverted,) that was incompatible with the sordid infirmities of the miser, had a determined and

insatiable ambition to which gold was a necessary instrument. Wedded to one she loved, like Mainwaring, the ambition, as we have said in a former chapter, could have lived in another, and become devoted to intellectual efforts, in the nobler desire for power based on fame and genius. But now she had the gloomy cravings of one fallen, and the uneasy desire to restore herself to a lost position—she fed as an aliment upon scorn to bitterness, of all beings and all things around her. She was gnawed by that false fever which riots in those who seek by outward seemings and distinctions to console themselves for the want of their own self-esteem; or who, despising the world with which they are brought in contact, sigh for those worldly advantages, which alone justify to the world itself their contempt.

To these diseased infirmities of vanity or pride, whether exhibited in Gabriel or Lucretia, Dalibard administered without apparent effort, not only by his conversation, but his habits of life. He mixed with those much wealthier than himself, but not better born—those who, in the hot and fierce ferment of that new society, were rising fast into new aristocracy,—fortunate

soldiers, daring speculators, plunderers of many an argosy that had been wrecked in the Great Storm. Every one about them was actuated by the keen desire 'to make fortune'—the desire was contagious. They were not absolutely poor in the proper sense of the word poverty, with Dalibard's annuity and the interest of Lucretia's fortune, but they were poor compared to those with whom they associated—poor enough for discontent. Thus, the image of the mighty wealth from which, perhaps, but a single life divided them, became horribly haunting. To Gabriel's sensual vision, the image presented itself in the shape of unlimited pleasure and prodigal riot; to Lucretia, it wore the solemn majesty of power; to Dalibard himself, it was but the Eureka of a calculation—the palpable reward of wile, and scheme, and dexterous combinations. The devil had temptations suited to each. Meanwhile, the Dalibards were more and more with the Bellangers. Olivier glided in to talk of the chances and changes of the state and the market. Lucretia sate for hours, listening mutely to the Contractor's boasts of past frauds, or submitting to the martyrdom of his victorious games at tric-

trac. Gabriel, a spoiled darling, copied the pictures on the walls, complimented Madame, flattered Monsieur, and fawned on both for trinkets and crowns. Like three birds of night and omen, these three evil natures settled on the rich man's roof.

Was the rich man himself blind to the motives which budded forth into such attentive affection? His penetration was too acute—his ill opinion of mankind too strong, perhaps, for such amiable self-delusions. But he took all in good part, availed himself of Dalibard's hints and suggestions as to the employment of his capital; was polite to Lucretia, and readily condemned her to be beaten at tric-trac, while he accepted with *bonhomie* Gabriel's spirited copies of his pictures. But at times, there was a gleam of satire and malice in his round grey eyes, and an inward chuckle at the caresses and flatteries he received, which perplexed Dalibard, and humbled Lucretia. Had his wealth been wholly at his own disposal, these signs would have been inauspicious, but the new law was strict, and the bulk of Bellanger's property could not be alienated from his nearest kin. Was not Dalibard the nearest?

These hopes and speculations did not, as we have seen, absorb the restless and rank energies of Dalibard's crooked, but capacious and grasping intellect. Patiently and ingeniously he pursued his main political object—the detection of that audacious and complicated conspiracy against the First Consul, which ended in the tragic deaths of Pichegru, the Duc D'Enghien, and the erring but illustrious hero of La Vendée, George Cadoudal. In the midst of these dark plots for personal aggrandizement and political fortune, we leave, for the moment, the sombre sullen soul of Olivier Dalibard.

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Time has passed on, and Spring is over the world; the seeds, buried in the earth, burst to flower; but man's breast knoweth not the sweet division of the seasons. In winter or summer, autumn or spring alike, his thoughts sow the germs of his actions, and day after day his destiny gathers in her harvests.

The joy-bells ring clear through the groves of Laughton—an heir is born to the old name and fair lands of St. John! And, as usual, the present

race welcomes merrily in, that which shall succeed and replace it—that which shall thrust the enjoyers down into the black graves, and wrest from them the pleasant goods of the world. The joy-bell of birth is a note of warning to the knell for the dead; it wakes the worms beneath the mould; the new-born, every year that it grows and flourishes, speeds the Parent to their feast. Yet who can predict that the infant shall become the heir?—who can tell that Death sits not side by side with the nurse at the cradle? Can the mother's hand measure out the woof of the *Parcæ*, or the father's eye detect, through the darkness of the morrow, the gleam of the fatal shears?

It is market-day, at a town in the midland districts of England. There, Trade takes its healthiest and most animated form. You see not the stunted form and hollow eye of the mechanic—poor slave of the capitalist—poor agent and victim of the arch disequalizer—Civilization. There, strides the burly form of the farmer; there, waits the ruddy hind with his flock; there, patient, sits the miller with his samples of corn; there, in the booths, gleam the humble wares which form the luxuries of cottage and farm. The thronging of men, and

the clacking of whips, and the dull sound of wagon or dray, that parts the crowd as it passes, and the lowing of herds, and the bleating of sheep, all are sounds of movement and bustle, yet blent with the pastoral associations of the Primitive Commerce, when the link between market and farm was visible and direct.

Towards one large house in the centre of the brisk life ebbing on, you might see stream after stream pour its way. The large doors swinging light on their hinges, the gilt letters that shine above the threshold, the windows, with their shutters outside cased in iron and studded with nails, announce that that house is the Bank of the town. Come in with that yeoman, whose broad face tells its tale, sheepish and down-eyed—he has come not to invest, but to borrow. What matters, war is breaking out anew, to bring the time of high prices, and paper money, and credit. Honest yeoman, you will not be refused. He scratches his rough head, pulls a leg, as he calls it, when the clerk leans over the counter, and asks to see “Muster Mawnering hisself.” The clerk points to the little office-room of the new junior partner, who has brought ten thousand pounds, and a clear

head, to the firm. And the yeoman's great boots creak heavily in. I told you so, honest yeoman; you come out with a smile on your brown face, and your hand, that might fell an ox, buttons up your huge breeches-pocket. You will ride home with a light heart—go and dine, and be merry.

The yeoman tramps to the Ordinary; plates clatter, tongues wag; and the borrower's full heart finds vent in a good word for that kind "Muster Mawnering." For a wonder, all join in the praise. "He's an honour to the town; he's a pride to the county—thof he's such a friend at a pinch, he's a rale mon of business! He'll make the baunk worth a 'million!—and how well he spoke at the great county meeting about the war, and the laund, and them blood-thirsty Mounseers! If their members were loike him, Muster Fox would look small!"

The day declines; the town empties—whiskies, horses, and carts, are giving life to the roads and the lanes—and the market is deserted, and the bank is shut up, and William Mainwaring walks back to his home at the skirts of the town—not villa, nor cottage—that plain English house with its cheerful face of red brick, and its solid square-

ness of shape—a symbol of substance in the fortunes of the owner ! Yet, as he passes, he sees through the distant trees the hall of the member for the town. He pauses a moment, and sighs unquietly. That pause and that sigh betray the germ of ambition and discontent. Why should not he who can speak so well, be member for the town, instead of that stammering squire ? But his reason has soon silenced the querulous murmur. He hastens his step—he is at home ! And there, in the neat furnished drawing-room, which looks on the garden behind, hisses the welcoming tea-urn ; and the piano is open, and there is a packet of new books on the table : and, best of all, there is the glad face of the sweet English wife. The happy scene was characteristic of the time, just when the simpler and more innocent luxuries of the higher class spread, not to spoil, but refine the middle. The dress, air, mien, movements, of the young couple ; the unassuming, suppressed, sober elegance of the house ; the flower-garden, the books, and the music, evidences of cultivated taste, not signals of display,—all bespoke the gentle fusion of ranks, before rude and uneducated wealth, made in looms and lucky hits, rushed

in to separate for ever the gentleman from the *parvenu*.

Spring smiles over Paris, over the spires of Nôtre Dame, and the crowded alleys of the Tuileries, over thousands and thousands eager, joyous, aspiring, reckless—the New Race of France—bound to one man's destiny, children of glory and of carnage, whose blood the wolf and the vulture scent, hungry, from afar!

The conspiracy against the life of the First Consul has been detected and defeated. Pichegru is in prison, George Cadoudal awaits his trial, the Duc D'Enghien sleeps in his bloody grave; the imperial crown is prepared for the great soldier, and the great soldier's creatures bask in the noon-day sun. Olivier Dalibard is in high and lucrative employment: his rise is ascribed to his talents—his opinions. No service connected with the detection of the conspiracy is traced or traceable by the public eye. If such exist, it is known but to those who have no desire to reveal it. The old apartments are retained; but they are no longer dreary, and comfortless, and deserted. They are gay with draperies, and or-molu, and mirrors; and Madame Dalibard has her

nights of reception, and Monsieur Dalibard has already his troops of clients. In that gigantic concentration of egotism which, under Napoleon, is called The State, Dalibard has found his place. He has served to swell the power of the unit, and the cipher gains importance by its position in the sum.

Jean Bellanger is no more. He died, not suddenly, and yet of some quick disease—nervous exhaustion: his schemes, they said, had worn him out. But the estate of Dalibard, though prosperous, is not that of the heir to the dead millionaire. What mistake is this? The bulk of that wealth must go to the nearest kin—so runs the law. But the will is read; and, for the first time, Olivier Dalibard learns that the dead man had a son—a son by a former marriage—the marriage undeclared, unknown, amidst the riot of the revolution; for the wife was the daughter of a *proscrit*. The son had been reared at a distance, put to school at Lyons, and, unavowed to the second wife, who had brought an ample dower, and whom that discovery might have deterred from the altar. Unacknowledged through life—in death, at least, the son's rights

are proclaimed: and Olivier Dalibard feels that Jean Bellanger has died in vain! For days has the pale Provençal been closeted with lawyers; but there is no hope in litigation. The proofs of the marriage, the birth, the identity, come out clear and clearer; and the beardless schoolboy at Lyons reaps all the profit of those nameless schemes and that mysterious death. Olivier Dalibard desires the friendship—the intimacy of the heir. But the heir is consigned to the guardianship of a merchant at Lyons, near of kin to his mother—and the guardian responds but coldly to Olivier's letters. Suddenly the defeated aspirant seems reconciled to his loss. The widow Bellanger has her own separate fortune; and it is large, beyond expectation. In addition to the wealth she brought the deceased, his affection had led him to invest vast sums in her name. The widow, then, is rich—rich as the heir himself. She is still fair. Poor woman, she needs consolation! But, meanwhile, the nights of Olivier Dalibard are disturbed and broken. His eye, in the day-time, is haggard and anxious; he is seldom seen on foot in the streets. Fear is his companion by day, and sits at night on

his pillow. The *Chouan*, Pierre Guillot, who looked to George Cadoudal as a god, knows that George Cadoudal has been betrayed, and suspects Olivier Dalibard; and the *Chouan* has an arm of iron and a heart steeled against all mercy. Oh, how the pale scholar thirsted for that *Chouan's* blood! With what relentless pertinacity, with what ingenious research he had set all the hounds of the police upon the track of that single man! How notably he had failed! An avenger lived; and Olivier Dalibard started at his own shadow on the wall. But he did not the less continue to plot and to intrigue—nay, such occupation became more necessary, as an escape from himself.

And, in the meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard sought to take courage from the recollection that the *Chouan* had taken an oath (and he knew that oaths are held sacred with the Bretons) that he would keep his hand from his knife, unless he had clear evidence of treachery;—such evidence existed, but only in Dalibard's desk, or the archives of Fouché. Tush, he was safe! And so, when, from dreams of fear, he started at the depth of night, so his bolder wife would whisper to him with firm uncaressing lips. Olivier Dalibard, thou

fearest the living, dost thou never fear the dead? Thy dreams are haunted with a spectre. Why takes it not the accusing shape of thy mouldering kinsman? Dalibard would have answered, for he was a philosopher in his cowardice, "*Il n'y a que les morts, qui ne reviennent pas.*"

It is the notable convenience of us narrators to represent, by what is called *soliloquy*, the thoughts—the interior of the personages we describe. And this is almost the master-work of the tale-teller—that is, if the soliloquy be really in words, what self-commune is in the dim and tangled recesses of the human heart! But to this privilege we are rarely admitted in the case of Olivier Dalibard; for he rarely communed with himself; a sort of mental calculation, it is true, eternally went on within him, like the wheels of a destiny; but it had become a mechanical operation—seldom disturbed by that *consciousness of thought*, with its struggles of fear and doubt, conscience and crime, which gives its appalling interest to the soliloquy of tragedy. Amidst the tremendous secrecy of that profound intellect, as at the bottom of a sea, only monstrous images of terror, things of prey, stirred in cold-blooded and devouring life; but into these

deeps Olivier himself did not dive. He did not face his own soul; his outer life and his inner life seemed separate individualities, just as, in some complicated State, the social machine goes on through all its numberless cycles of vice and dread, whatever the acts of the government, which is the representative of the state, and stands for the state in the shallow judgment of history.

Before this time, Olivier Dalibard's manner to his son had greatly changed from the indifference it betrayed in England: it was kind and affectionate, almost caressing; while, on the other hand, Gabriel, as if in possession of some secret which gave him power over his father, took a more careless and independent tone, often absented himself from the house for days together, joined the revels of young profligates older than himself, with whom he had formed acquaintance, indulged in spendthrift expenses, and plunged prematurely into the stream of vicious pleasure that oozed through the mud of Paris.

One morning, Dalibard, returning from a visit to Madame Bellanger, found Gabriel alone in the *salon*, contemplating his fair face and gay dress in one of the mirrors, and smoothing down the

hair, which he wore long and sleek, as in the portraits of Raffaele. Dalibard's lip curled at the boy's coxcombry, though such tastes he himself had fostered, according to his ruling principles, that, to govern, you must find a foible, or instil it; but the sneer changed into a smile.

"Are you satisfied with yourself, *joli garçon*?" he said, with saturnine playfulness.

"At least, sir, I hope that you will not be ashamed of me, when you formally legitimize me as your son. The time has come, you know, to keep your promise."

"And it shall be kept, do not fear. But first, I have an employment for you—a mission—your first embassy, Gabriel."

"I listen, sir."

"I have to send to England a communication of the utmost importance—public importance—to the secret agent of the French government. We are on the eve of a descent on England. We are in correspondence with some in London on whom we count for support. A man might be suspected, and searched—mind, *searched*. You, a boy, with English name and speech, will be my safest envoy. Buonaparte approves my selection.

On your return, he permits me to present you to him. He loves the rising generation. In a few days, you will be prepared to start."

Despite the calm tone of the father, so had the son, from the instinct of fear and self-preservation, studied every accent, every glance of Olivier—so had he constituted himself a spy upon the heart whose perfidy was ever armed, that he detected at once in the proposal some scheme hostile to his interests. He made, however, no opposition to the plan suggested; and, seemingly satisfied with his obedience, the father dismissed him.

As soon as he was in the streets, Gabriel went straight to the house of Madame Bellanger. The hotel had been purchased in her name, and she therefore retained it. Since her husband's death, he had avoided that house, before so familiar to him; and now he grew pale, and breathed hard, as he passed by the porter's lodge up the lofty stairs.

He knew of his father's recent and constant visits at the house; and, without conjecturing precisely what were Olivier's designs, he connected them, in the natural and acquired shrewdness he possessed, with the wealthy widow. He resolved

to watch, observe, and draw his own conclusions. As he entered Madame Bellanger's room rather abruptly, he observed her push aside amongst her papers something she had been gazing on—something which sparkled to his eyes. He sate himself down close to her, with the caressing manner he usually adopted towards women; and in the midst of the babbling talk with which ladies generally honour boys, he suddenly, and as if by accident, displaced the papers, and saw his father's miniature set in brilliants. The start of the widow, her blush, and her exclamation, strengthened the light that flashed upon his mind. "O-ho, I see now," he said, laughing, "why my father is always praising black hair; and—nay, nay—gentlemen may admire ladies in Paris, surely!"

"Pooh, my dear child, your father is an old friend of my poor husband's, and a near relation, too! But, Gabriel, *mon petit ange!* you had better not say at home that you have seen this picture,—Madame Dalibard might be foolish enough to be angry."

"To be sure not. I have kept a secret before now!" and again the boy's cheek grew pale, and he looked hurriedly round.

“And you are very fond of Madame Dalibard, too, so you must not vex her.”

“Who says I’m fond of Madame Dalibard?—a stepmother!”

“Why, your father, of course—*il est si bon—ce pauvre Dalibard*; and all men like cheerful faces, but then, poor lady—an English woman, so strange here—very natural she should fret,—and with bad health, too.”

“Bad health, ah! I remember!—*she* also does not seem likely to live long!”

“So your poor father apprehends. Well, well, how uncertain life is! Who would have thought dear Bellanger would have——”

Gabriel rose hastily, and interrupted the widow’s pathetic reflections. “I only ran in to say, *Bon jour*. I must leave you now.”

“Adieu, my dear boy—not a word on the miniature! By-the-bye, here’s a shirt-pin for you—*tu es joli comme un amour*.”

All was now clear to Gabriel—it was necessary to get rid of him, and for ever! Dalibard might dread his attachment to Lucretia—he would dread still more his closer intimacy with the widow of Bellanger, should that widow wed again—and

Dalibard, freed like her (by what means?) be her choice! Into that abyss of wickedness, fathomless to the innocent, the young villanous eye plunged, and surveyed the ground; a terror seized on him—a terror of life and death. Would Dalibard spare even his own son, if that son had the power to injure. This mission—was it exile only?—only a fall back to the old squalor of his uncle's studio?—only the laying aside of a useless tool—or was it a snare to the grave? Demon, as Dalibard was, doubtless the boy wronged him. But guilt construes guilt for the worst.

Gabriel had formerly enjoyed the thought to match himself, should danger come, with Dalibard; the hour *had* come, and he felt his impotence. Brave his father, and refuse to leave France! from that even his reckless hardihood shrank as from inevitable destruction. But to depart—be the poor victim and dupe; after having been let loose amongst the riot of pleasure, to return to labour and privation—from that option his vanity and his senses vindictively revolted. And Lucretia!—the only being who seemed to have a human kindness to him!—through all the vicious egotism of his nature, he had some grateful senti-

ments for her!—and even the egotism assisted that unwonted amiability, for he felt that, Lucretia gone, he had no hold on his father's house—that the home of her successor never would be his. While thus brooding, he lifted his eyes, and saw Dalibard pass in his carriage towards the Tuileries. The house, then, was clear—he could see Lucretia alone. He formed his resolution at once, and turned homewards. As he did so, he observed a man at the angle of the street, whose eyes followed Dalibard's carriage with an expression of unmistakeable hate and revenge; but scarcely had he marked the countenance, before the man, looking hurriedly round, darted away and was lost amongst the crowd.

Now, that countenance was not quite unfamiliar to Gabriel. He had seen it before, as he saw it now,—hastily, and, as it were, by fearful snatches. Once he had marked, on returning home at twilight, a figure lurking by the house—and something in the quickness with which it turned from his gaze, joined to his knowledge of Dalibard's apprehensions, made him mention the circumstance to his father, when he entered. Dalibard bade him hasten with a note, written hurriedly, to

an agent of the police, whom he kept lodged near at hand. The man was still on the threshold, when the boy went out on this errand, and he caught a glimpse of his face; but before the police agent reached the spot, the ill-omened apparition had vanished. Gabriel now, as his eye rested full upon that threatening brow, and those burning eyes, was convinced that he saw before him the terrible Pierre Guillot, whose very name blanched his father's cheek. When the figure retreated, he resolved at once to pursue. He hurried through the crowd amidst which the man had disappeared, and looked eagerly into the faces of those he jostled—sometimes, at the distance, he caught sight of a figure, which appeared to resemble the one which he pursued, but the likeness faded on approach. The chase, however, vague and desultory as it was, led him on till his way was lost amongst labyrinths of narrow and unfamiliar streets. Heated and thirsty, he paused at last before a small *café*—entered to ask for a draught of lemonade—and behold, chance had favoured him!—the man he sought was seated there, before a bottle of wine, and intently reading the newspaper. Gabriel sat himself down at the adjoining

table. In a few moments the man was joined by a new comer—the two conversed, but in whispers so low, that Gabriel was unable to hear their conversation—though he caught more than once the name of “George.” Both the men were violently excited, and the expression of their countenances was menacing and sinister. The first-comer pointed often to the newspaper, and read passages from it to his companion. This suggested to Gabriel the demand for another journal. When the waiter brought it to him, his eye rested upon a long paragraph, in which the name of George Cadoudal frequently occurred. In fact, all the journals of the day were filled with speculations on the conspiracy and trial of that fiery martyr to an erring adaptation of a noble principle. Gabriel knew that his father had had a principal share in the detection of the defeated enterprise; and his previous persuasions were confirmed.

His sense of hearing grew sharper by continued effort, and at length he heard the first-comer say distinctly—“If I were but sure that I had brought this fate upon George, by introducing to him that accursed Dalibard—if my oath did but justify me, I would——;” the concluding sentence was lost.

A few moments after, the two men rose, and from the familiar words that passed between them and the master of the *café*, who approached, himself, to receive the reckoning, the shrewd boy perceived that the place was no unaccustomed haunt. He crept nearer and nearer; and as the landlord shook hands with his customer, he heard distinctly the former address him by the name of "Guillot." When the men withdrew, Gabriel followed them at a distance, (taking care first to impress on his memory the name of the *café*, and the street in which it was placed) and, as he thought, unobserved; he was mistaken. Suddenly, in one street, more solitary than the rest, the man whom he was mainly bent on tracking, turned round—advanced to Gabriel, who was on the other side of the street, and laid his hand upon him so abruptly, that the boy was fairly taken by surprise.

"Who bade you follow us?" said he, with so dark and fell an expression of countenance, that even Gabriel's courage failed him: "no evasion—no lies—speak out, and at once;" and the grasp tightened on the boy's throat.

Gabriel's readiness of resource and presence of mind did not long forsake him.

"Loose your hold, and I will tell you—you stifle me." The man slightly relaxed his grasp, and Gabriel said, quickly—"My mother perished on the guillotine in the Reign of Terror; I am for the Bourbons. I thought I overheard words which showed sympathy for poor George, the brave *Chouan*. I followed you; for I thought I was following friends."

The man smiled as he fixed his steady eye upon the unflinching child: "My poor lad," he said, gently, "I believe you—pardon me—but follow us no more—we are dangerous!" He waved his hand, and strode away—rejoined his companion, and Gabriel reluctantly abandoned the pursuit, and went homeward. It was long before he reached his father's house, for he had strayed into a strange quarter of Paris, and had frequently to inquire the way. At length, he reached home, and ascended the stairs to a small room, in which Lucretia usually sate, and which was divided by a narrow corridor from the sleeping chamber of herself and Dalibard. His stepmother, leaning her cheek

upon her hand, was seated by the window, so absorbed in some gloomy thoughts, which cast over her rigid face a shade, intense and solemn as despair, that she did not perceive the approach of the boy till he threw his arm round her neck, and then she started as in alarm——

“You! only *you*,” she said, with a constrained smile; “see, my nerves are not so strong as they were!”

“You are disturbed, *belle mère*, has *he* been vexing you?”

“He—Dalibard—no, indeed, we were only, this morning, discussing matters of business.”

“Business!—that means money!”

“Truly,” said Lucretia, “money does make the staple of life’s business. In spite of his new appointment, your father needs some sums in hand—favours are to be bought—opportunities for speculation occur, and——”

“And my father,” interrupted Gabriel, “wishes your consent to raise the rest of your portion.”

Lucretia looked surprised, but answered quietly: “He had my consent long since, but the trustees to the marriage settlement—mere men of business—my uncle’s bankers, for I had lost all claim on

my kindred—refuse, or at least interpose such difficulties as amount to refusal.”

“ But that reply came some days since,” said Gabriel, musingly.

“ How did you know—did your father tell you?”

“ Poor *belle mère!*” said Gabriel, almost with pity, “ can you live in this house, and not watch all that passes—every stranger, every message, every letter?—But what, then, does he wish with you?”

“ He has suggested my returning to England, and seeing the trustees myself. His interest can obtain my passport.”

“ And you have refused?”

“ I have not consented.”

“ Consent!—Hush!—your maid—Marie—is not waiting without,” and Gabriel rose and looked out; “ no, confound these doors!—none close as they ought in this house. Is it not a clause in your settlement that the half of your fortune now invested goes to the survivor?”

“ It is,” replied Lucretia, struck and thrilled at the question. “ How, again, did you know this?”

“ I saw my father reading the copy. If you

die first, then, he has all! If he merely wanted the money, he would not send you away!"

There was a terrible pause. Gabriel resumed: "I trust you, it may be, with my life; but I will speak out. My father goes much to Bel-langer's widow—she is rich and weak. Come to England! Yes, *come*—for he is about to dismiss *me*. He fears that I shall be in the way, to warn you, perhaps, or to—to—in short, *both* of us are in his way. He gives you an escape. Once in England, the war which is breaking out will prevent your return. He will twist the laws of divorce to his favour—he will marry again! What then?—he spares you what remains of your fortune—he spares your life. Remain here—cross his schemes—and—no, no;—come to England—safer anywhere than here!"

As he spoke, great changes had passed over Lucretia's countenance. At first it was the flash of conviction, then the stunned shock of horror; now she rose—rose to her full height—and there was a livid and deadly light in her eyes—the light of conscious courage, and power, and revenge. "Fool," she muttered, "with all his craft! Fool, fool! As if, in the war of household perfidy, the

woman did not always conquer! Man's only chance is to be mailed in honour!"

"But," said Gabriel, overhearing her, "but you do not remember what it is. There is nothing you can see, and guard against. It is not like an enemy face to face; it is death in the food, in the air, in the touch. You stretch out your arms in the dark—you feel nothing, and you die! Oh, do not fancy that I have not thought well (for I am almost a man now) if there were no means to resist—there are none! As well make head against the plague—it is in the atmosphere. Come to England, and return. Live poorly, if you must—but live!—but *live!*"

"Return to England poor and despised, and bound still to him, or a disgraced and divorced wife—disgraced by the low-born dependent on my kinsman's house—and fawn perhaps upon my sister and her husband for bread! Never!—I am at my post, and I will not fly!"

"Brave! brave!" said the boy, clapping his hands, and sincerely moved by a daring superior to his own—"I wish I could help you!"

Lucretia's eye rested on him with the full gaze, so rare in its looks. She drew him to her, and

kissed his brow—" Boy, through life, whatever our guilt and its doom, we are bound to each other. I may yet live to have wealth—if so, it is yours as a son's. I may be iron to others—never to you. Enough of this—I must reflect!" She passed her hand over her eyes a moment, and resumed—" You would help me in my self-defence; I think you can. You have been more alert in your watch than I have. You must have means I have not secured. Your father guards well all his papers!"

" I have keys to every desk. My foot passed the threshold of that room under the roof, before yours. But, no; his powers can never be yours! He has never confided to you half his secrets! He has antidotes for every—every——"

" Hist! what noise is that? Only the shower on the casements! No, no, child, that is not my object. Cadoudal's conspiracy! Your father has letters from Fouché, which show how he has betrayed others who are stronger to avenge than a woman and a boy."

" Well!"

" I would have those letters! Give me the keys! But hold!—Gabriel—Gabriel, you may

yet misjudge him. This woman—wife to the dead man—*his* wife! Horror! Have you no proofs of what you imply?”

“Proofs!” echoed Gabriel, in a tone of wonder, “I can but see and conjecture. You are warned, watch and decide for yourself. But again I say, come to England! *I* shall go!”

Without reply, Lucretia took the keys from Gabriel’s half-reluctant hand, and passed into her husband’s writing room. When she had entered, she locked the door. She passed at once to a huge secretary, of which the key was small as a fairy’s work. She opened it with ease by one of the counterfeits. No love correspondence—the first object of her search, for she was woman—met her eye. What need of letters, when interviews were so facile! But she soon found a document that told all which love-letters could tell—it was an account of the monies and possessions of Madame Bellanger—and there were pencil notes on the margin:—“Vautran will give 400,000 francs for the lands in Auvergne—to be accepted. Consult on the power of sale granted to a second husband. Query, if there is no chance of the heir-at-law disputing the monies invested in Madame B.’s name,”

—and such memoranda as a man notes down in the schedule of properties about to be his own. In these inscriptions there was a hideous mockery of all love—like the blue-lights of corruption, they showed the black vault of the heart. The pale reader saw what her own attractions had been, and, fallen as she was, she smiled superior in her bitterness of scorn. Arranged methodically with the precision of business, she found the letters she next looked for;—one recognising Dalibard's services in the detection of the conspiracy, and authorizing him to employ the police in the search of Pierre Guillot, sufficed for her purpose. She withdrew, and secreted it. She was about to lock up the secretary, when her eye fell on the title of a small MS. volume in a corner; and as she read, she pressed one hand convulsively to her heart, while, twice with the other, she grasped the volume, and twice withdrew the grasp. The title ran harmlessly thus :—“*Philosophical and chemical inquiries into the nature and materials of the poisons in use between the 14th and 16th centuries.*” Hurriedly, and at last, as if doubtful of herself, she left the MS., closed the secretary, and returned to Gabriel.

“You have got the paper you seek?” he said.

"Yes."

"Then whatever you do, you must be quick—he will soon discover the loss."

"I will be quick."

"It is I whom he will suspect," said Gabriel, in alarm, as that thought struck him. "No, for my sake, do not take the letter till I am gone. Do not fear, in the meantime—he will do nothing against you, while I am here." "

"I will replace the letter till then," said Lucretia, meekly. "You have a right to my first thoughts." So she went back, and Gabriel, (suspicious, perhaps,) crept after her.

As she replaced the document, he pointed to the MS. which had tempted her—"I have seen that before, how I longed for it! If anything ever happens to him, I claim *that* as my legacy."

Their hands met as he said this, and grasped each other convulsively; Lucretia relocked the secretary, and when she gained the next room, she tottered to a chair. Her strong nerves gave way for the moment; she uttered no cry, but, by the whiteness of her face, Gabriel saw that she was senseless; senseless for a minute or so—scarcely more. But the return to consciousness with a

clenched hand, and a brow of defiance, and a stare of mingled desperation and dismay, seemed rather the awaking from some frightful dream of violence and struggle than the slow languid recovery from the faintness of a swoon. Yes, henceforth, to sleep, was to couch by a serpent—to breathe was to listen for the avalanche ! Thou, who didst trifle so wantonly with Treason, now gravely front the grim comrade thou hast won ; thou, scheming desecrator of the Household Gods, now learn, to the last page of dark knowledge, what the hearth is without them !

Gabriel was strangely moved as he beheld that proud and solitary despair. An instinct of nature had hitherto checked him from actively aiding Lucretia in that struggle with his father, which could but end in the destruction of one or the other. He had contented himself with forewarnings, with hints, with indirect suggestions ; but now, all his sympathy was so strongly roused on her behalf, that the last faint scruple of filial conscience vanished into the abyss of blood, over which stood that lonely Titaness. He drew near, and, clasping her hand, said, in a quick and broken voice—

"Listen! You know where to find proof of my fa—that is, of—Dalibard's treason to the conspirators; you know the name of the man he dreads as an avenger, and you know that he waits but the proof to strike; but you do not know where to find that man, if his revenge is wanting for yourself. The police has not hunted him out; how can you? Accident has made me acquainted with one of his haunts. Give me a single promise, and I will put you at least upon that clue—weak, perhaps, but as yet the sole one to be followed. Promise me that, only in defence of your own life, not for mere jealousy, you will avail yourself of the knowledge, and you shall know all I do!"

"Do you think," said Lucretia, in a calm, cold voice, "that it is for jealousy, which is love, that I would murder all hope, all peace; for we have here—(and she smote her breast)—here, if not elsewhere, a heaven and a hell! Son, I will not harm your father, except in self-defence! But tell me nothing that may make the son a party in the father's doom."

"The father slew the mother," muttered Gabriel, between his clenched teeth; "and to me,

you have well nigh supplied her place. Strike, if need be, in her name! If you are driven to want the arm of Pierre Guillot, seek news of him at the *Café Dufour, Rue S——, Boulevard du Temple*. Be calm now, I hear your husband's step."

A few days more, and Gabriel is gone! Wife and husband are alone with each other. Lucretia has refused to depart. Then that mute coma of horror! that suspense of two foes in the conflict of death—for the subtle prying eye of Olivier Dalibard sees that he himself is suspected—farther he shuns from sifting! Glance fastens on glance, and then hurries smilingly away. From the cup, grins a skeleton—at the board, warns a spectre. But how kind still the words, and how gentle the tone; and they lie down side by side in the marriage bed—brain plotting against brain, heart loathing heart. It is a duel of life and death, between those sworn through life and beyond death at the altar. But it is carried on with all the forms and courtesies of duel in the age of chivalry. No conjugal wrangling—no slip of the tongue;—the oil is on the surface of the wave—the monsters in the hell

of the abyss war invisibly below. At length, a dull torpor creeps over the woman—she feels the taint in her veins,—the slow victory is begun. What mattered all her vigilance and caution? Vainly glide from the pangs of the serpent, his very breath suffices to destroy! Pure seems the draught and wholesome the viand—that master of the science of murder needs not the means of the bungler! Then, keen and strong from the creeping lethargy started the fierce instinct of self and the ruthless impulse of revenge. Not too late yet to escape; for those subtle banes, that are to defy all detection, work but slowly to their end.

One evening, a woman, closely mantled, stood at watch by the angle of a wall. The light came dim and muffled from the window of a *café* hard at hand—the reflection slept amidst the shadows on the dark pavement, and, save a solitary lamp, swung at distance in the vista over the centre of the narrow street, no other ray broke the gloom. The night was clouded and starless, the wind moaned at gusts, and the rain fell heavily; but the gloom and the loneliness did not appal the eye, and the wind did not chill the heart, and the

rain fell unheeded on the head, of the woman at her post. At times, she paused, in her slow, sentry-like pace to and fro, to look through the window of the *café*, and her gaze fell always on one figure seated apart from the rest. At length, her pulse beat more quickly, and the patient lips smiled sternly. The figure had risen to depart. A man came out, and walked quickly up the street, the woman approached, and when the man was under the single lamp swung aloft, he felt his arm touched; the woman was at his side, and looking steadily into his face—

“ You are Pierre Guillot, the Breton, the friend of George Cadoudal. Will you be his avenger ? ”

The *Chouan's* first impulse had been to place his hand in his vest, and something shone bright in the lamplight, clasped in those iron fingers. The voice and the manner reassured him, and he answered readily—

“ I am he whom you seek, and I only live to avenge.”

“ Read, then, and act,” answered the woman, and she placed a paper in his hands.

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At Laughton, the babe is on the breast of the fair mother ; and the father sits beside the bed ; and mother and father dispute almost angrily whether mother or father, those soft rounded features of slumbering infancy resemble most. At the red house, near the market town, there is a hospitable bustle. William is home, earlier than usual. Within the last hour, Susan has been thrice into every room. Husband and wife are now watching at the window. The good Fieldens, with a coach full of children, are expected, every moment, on a week's visit, at least.

In the *café*, in the *Boulevard du Temple*, sit Pierre Guillot, the *Chouan*, and another of the old band of *brigands*, whom George Cadoudal had mustered in Paris. There is an expression of content on Guillot's countenance—it seems more open than usual, and there is a complacent smile on his lips. He is whispering low to his friend, in the intervals of eating, an employment pursued with the hearty gusto of a hungry man. But his friend does not seem to sympathize with the cheerful feelings of his comrade ; he is pale, and there is terror on his face ; and you may see that the journal in his hand trembles like a leaf,

In the gardens of the Tuilleries, some score or so of gossips groupe together.

“And no news of the murderer?” asked one.

“No; but a man who had been friend to Robespierre must have made secret enemies enough.”

“*Ce pauvre Dalibard!* He was not mixed up with the *Terrorists*, nevertheless.”

“Ah, but the more deadly for that, perhaps—a sly man was Olivier Dalibard!”

“What’s the matter?” said an *employé*, lounging up to the groupe. “Are you talking of Olivier Dalibard? It is but the other day he had Marsan’s appointment. He is now to have Pleyel’s. I heard it two days ago—a capital thing! *Peste, il ira loin!* We shall see him a senator soon.”

“Speak for yourself,” quoth a *ci-devant* Abbé, with a laugh. “I should be sorry to see him again, soon, wherever he is.”

“*Plait il!*—I don’t understand you!”

“Don’t you know that Olivier Dalibard is murdered—found stabbed—in his own house, too!”

“*Ciel!* Pray tell me all you know.—His place, then, is vacant!”

“Why, it seems that Dalibard, who had been

brought up to medicine, was still fond of chemical experiments. He hired a room at the top of the house for such scientific amusements. He was accustomed to spend part of his nights there. They found him at morning, bathed in his blood, with three ghastly wounds in his side, and his fingers cut to the bone. He had struggled hard with the knife that butchered him."

"In his own house!" said a lawyer: "some servant or spendthrift heir!"

"He has no heir but young Bellanger, who will be *riche à millions*, and is now but a school-boy at Lyons. No; it seems that the window was left open, and that it communicates with the roof tops. There, the murderer had entered, and by that way escaped, for they found the leads of the gutter dabbled with blood. The next house was uninhabited—easy enough to get in there, and lie *perdu* till night."

"Hum," said the lawyer; "but the assassin could only have learned Dalibard's habits from some one in the house. Was the deceased married?"

"Oh, yes; to an Englishwoman."

"She had lovers, perhaps?"

“Pooh! lovers!—the happiest couple ever known! You should have seen them together. I dined there last week.”

“It is strange!” said the lawyer.

“And he was getting on so well,” muttered a hungry-looking man.

“And his place is vacant!” repeated the *employé*, as he quitted the crowd, abstractedly.

In the house of Olivier Dalibard sits Lucretia, alone, and in her own usual morning room. The officer, appointed to such tasks by the French law, has performed his visit, and made his notes, and expressed condolence with the widow, and promised justice and retribution, and placed his seal on the locks till the Representatives of the heir-at-law shall arrive; and the heir-at-law is the very boy who had succeeded so unexpectedly to the wealth of Jean Bellanger, the Contractor! But Lucretia has obtained beforehand all she wishes to save from the rest. An open box is on the floor, into which her hand drops noiselessly a volume in manuscript. On the fore-finger of that hand is a ring, larger and more massive than those usually worn by women;—by Lucretia never worn before. Why should that ring have been selected with such care from the dead man’s hoards?

why so precious the dull opal in that cumbrous setting? — From the hand the volume drops without sound into the box, as those whom the secrets of the volume instruct you to destroy, may drop without noise into the grave. The trace of some illness, recent and deep, nor conquered yet, has ploughed lines in that young countenance, and dimmed the light of those searching eyes. Yet, courage! the poison is arrested—the poisoner is no more—minds like thine, stern woman, are cased in coffers of steel, and the rust, as yet, has gnawed no deeper than the surface. So, over that face stamped with bodily suffering, plays a calm smile of triumph. The schemer has baffled the schemer! Turn now to the right, pass by that narrow corridor, you are in the marriage chamber—the windows are closed. Tall tapers burn at the foot of the bed. Now, go back to that narrow corridor; disregarded, thrown aside, are a cloth and a besom; the cloth is wet still; but here, and there, the red stains are dry, and clotted as with bloody glue; and the hairs of the besom start up, torn and ragged, as if the bristles had a sense of some horror—as if things inanimate still partook of men's dread at men's deeds. If you passed through the

corridor, and saw in the shadow of the wall that homeliest of instruments cast away and forgotten, you would smile at the slatternly housework. But if you knew that a corpse had been borne down those stairs to the left—borne along those floors to that marriage bed, with the blood oozing, and gushing, and plashing below, as the bearers passed with their burthen, then, straight that dead thing would take the awe of the dead being; it told its own tale of violence and murder; it had dabbled in the gore of the violated clay; it had become an evidence of the crime. No wonder that its hairs bristled up, sharp and ragged, in the shadow of the wall!

The first part of the tragedy ends. Let fall the curtain. When next it rises, years will have passed away, graves uncounted will have wrought fresh hollows in our merry sepulchre—sweet earth! Take a sand from the shore, take a drop from the ocean, less than sand-grain and drop in man's planet one Death and one Crime! On the map, trace all oceans, and search out every shore,—more than seas, more than lands, in God's balance shall weigh one Death and one Crime!

END OF PART THE FIRST.

PART THE SECOND.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE SECOND.

THE century has advanced: The rush of the deluge has ebbed back, the old landmarks have reappeared; the dynasties Napoleon willed into life have crumbled to the dust; the plough has passed over Waterloo; autumn after autumn the harvests have glittered on that grave of an empire. Through the immense ocean of universal change, we look back on the single track which our frail boat has cut through the waste. As a star shines impartially over the measureless expanse, though it seems to gild but *one* broken line to each eye; so, as our memory gazes on the past, the light spreads not over all the breadth of the waste, where nations have battled, and argosies gone down—it falls, narrow and confined, along the single course we have taken: We lean over the

small raft on which we float, and see the sparkles but reflected from the waves that it divides.

On the terrace at Laughton, but *one* step paces slowly. The bride clings not now to the bridegroom's arm. Though pale and worn, it is still the same gentle face; but the blush of woman's love has gone from it evermore.

Charles Vernon, (to call him still by the name in which he is best known to us,) sleeps in the vault of the Saint Johns. He had lived longer than he himself had expected, than his physician had hoped—lived, cheerful and happy, amidst quiet pursuits and innocent excitements. Three sons had blessed his hearth, to mourn over his grave. But the two elder were delicate and sickly. They did not long survive him, and died within a few months of each other. The third seemed formed of a different mould and constitution from his brethren. To him descended the ancient heritage of Laughton, and he promised to enjoy it long.

It is Vernon's widow who walks alone in the stately terrace; sad still, for she loved well the choice of her youth, and she misses yet the children in the grave; from the date of Vernon's

death, she wore mourning without and within; and the sorrows that came later, broke more the bruised reed;—sad still, but resigned. One son survives; and earth yet has the troubled hopes and the holy fears of affection. Though that son be afar, in sport or in earnest, in pleasure or in toil, working out his destiny as man, still that step is less solitary than it seems. When does the son's image not walk beside the mother? Though she lives in seclusion, though the gay world tempts no more, the gay world is yet linked to her thoughts. From the distance she hears its murmurs in music. Her fancy still mingles with the crowd, and follows one, to her eye, outshining all the rest. Never vain in herself, she is vain now of another; and the small triumphs of the young and well born seem trophies of renown to the eyes so tenderly deceived.

In the old-fashioned market town still the business goes on, still the doors of the Bank open and close every moment on the great day of the week; but the names over the threshold are partially changed. The junior partner is busy no more at the desk; not wholly forgotten—if his name still is spoken, it is not with thankfulness and praise.

A something rests on the name—that something which dims and attaints—not proven, not certain, but suspected and dubious. The head shakes, the voice whispers,—and the attorney now lives in the solid red house at the verge of the town.

In the vicarage, Time, the old scythe-bearer, has not paused from his work. Still employed on Greek texts, little changed, save that his hair is grey, and that some lines in his kindly face tell of sorrows as of years, the Vicar sits in his parlour, but the children no longer, blithe-voiced and rose-checked, dart through the rustling espaliers. Those children, grave men, or staid matrons (save one whom Death chose, and therefore now of all best beloved!) are at their posts in the world. The young ones are flown from the nest, and, with anxious wings, here and there, search food in their turn for their young. But the blithe voice and rose-cheek of the child make not that loss which the hearth misses the most. From childhood to manhood, and from manhood to departure, the natural changes are gradual and prepared. The absence most missed is that household life which presided, which kept things in order, and must be coaxed if a chair were

displaced. That providence in trifles, that clasp of small links, that dear, bustling agency—now pleased, now complaining—dear alike in each change of its humour; that active life which has no self of its own;—like the mind of a poet, though its prose be the humblest, transferring self into others, with its right to be cross, and its charter to scold;—for the motive is clear—it takes what it loves too anxiously to heart. The door of the parlour is open, the garden path still passes before the threshold; but no step now has full right to halt at the door, and interrupt the grave thought on Greek texts;—no small talk on details and wise savings chimes in with the wrath of *Medea*. The Prudent Genius is gone from the household; and perhaps as the good scholar now wearily pauses, and looks out on the silent garden, he would have given with joy all that Athens produced, from Æschylus to Plato, to hear again from the old familiar lips the lament on torn jackets, or the statistical economy of eggs!

But see, though the wife is no more, though the children have departed, the Vicar's home is not utterly desolate. See, along the same walk on

which William soothed Susan's fears, and won her consent—see, what fairy advances? Is it Susan returned to youth? How like!—yet, look again, and how unlike! The same, the pure, candid *regard*—the same, the clear, limpid blue of the eye—the same, that fair hue of the hair—light, but not auburn—more subdued, more harmonious than that equivocal colour which too nearly approaches to red. But how much more blooming and joyous than Susan's is that exquisite face in which all Hebe smiles forth—how much airier the tread, light with health—how much rounder, if slighter still, the wave of that undulating form! She smiles—her lips move—she is conversing with herself—she cannot be all silent, even when alone; for the sunny gladness of her nature must have vent like a bird's. But do not fancy that that gladness speaks the levity which comes from the absence of thought; it is rather from the depth of thought that it springs, as from the depth of a sea comes its music. See, as she pauses and listens, with her finger half raised to her lip, as amidst that careless jubilee of birds she hears a note more grave and sustained, the nightingale singing, by day,—(as sometimes, though

rarely, he is heard—perhaps, because he misses his mate—perhaps, because he sees from his bower the creeping form of some foe to his race); —see, as she listens now to that plaintive, low-chanted warble, how quickly the smile is sobered, how the shade, soft and pensive, steals over the brow. It is but the mystic sympathy with Nature that gives the smile or the shade. In that heart lightly moved beats the fine sense of the poet. It is the exquisite sensibility of the nerves that gives its blithe play to those spirits, and from the clearness of the atmosphere comes, warm and ethereal, the ray of that light.

And does the roof of the pastor give shelter to Helen Mainwaring's youth? Has Death taken from her the natural protectors? Those forms which we saw so full of youth and youth's heart, in that very spot,—has the grave closed on them yet? *Yet!*—how few attain to the age of the Psalmist! Twenty-seven years have passed since that date—how often, in those years, have the dark doors opened for the young as for the old! William Mainwaring died first, care-worn and shame-bowed: the blot on his name had cankered into his heart. Susan's life, always precarious, had struggled on,

while he lived, by the strong power of affection and will ;—she would not die, for who then could console him ? but at his death the power gave way. She lingered, but lingered dyingly for three years ; and then, for the first time since William's death, she smiled—that smile remained on the lips of the corpse. They had had many trials, that young couple whom we left so prosperous and happy ! Not till many years after their marriage had one sweet consoler been born to them. In the season of poverty, and shame, and grief, it came ; and there was no pride on Mainwaring's brow when they placed his first born in his arms. By her will, the widow consigned Helen to the joint guardianship of Mr. Fielden and her sister : but the latter was abroad, her address unknown, so the Vicar for two years had had sole charge of the orphan. She was not unprovided for. The sum that Susan brought to her husband, had been long since gone, it is true—lost in the calamity which had wrecked William Mainwaring's name and prospects—but Helen's grandfather, the land-agent, had died some time subsequent to that event, and, indeed, just before William's death. He had never forgiven his son the stain on his

name—never assisted, never even seen him since that fatal day—but he left to Helen a sum of about 8000*l.*,—for she, at least, was innocent. In Mr. Fielden's eyes, Helen was therefore an heiress. And who amongst his small range of acquaintance was good enough for her, not only so richly portioned, but so lovely?—accomplished too, for her parents had of late years lived chiefly in France, and languages there are easily learned, and masters cheap;—Mr. Fielden knew but one, whom Providence had also consigned to his charge—the supposed son of his old pupil Ardworth; but though a tender affection existed between the two young persons, it seemed too like that of brother and sister, to afford much ground for Mr. Fielden's anxiety or hope.

From his window the Vicar observed the still attitude of the young orphan for a few moments, then he pushed aside his books, rose, and approached her. At the sound of his tread, she woke from her reverie, and bounded lightly towards him.

“Ah, you would not see me before!” she said, in a voice in which there was the slightest possible foreign accent, which betrayed the country in

which her childhood had been passed—"I peeped in twice at the window. I wanted you so much, to walk to the village. But you will come now—will you not?" added the girl, coaxingly, as she looked up at him under the shade of her straw hat.

"And what do you want in the village, my pretty Helen?"

"Why you know it is Fair day, and you promised Bessie that you would buy her a fairing—to say nothing of me."

"Very true, and I ought to look in; it will help to keep the poor people from drinking. A clergyman should mix with his parishioners in their holidays. We must not associate our office only with grief, and sickness, and preaching. We will go. And what fairing are you to have?"

"Oh, something very brilliant, I promise you! I have formed grand notions of a fair. I am sure it must be like the bazaars we read of last night, in that charming 'Tour in the East.'"

The Vicar smiled, half benignly, half anxiously. "My dear child, it is so like you to suppose a village fair must be an eastern bazaar. If you always thus judge of things by your fancy,

how this sober world will deceive you, poor Helen !”

“ It is not my fault—*ne me grondez pas, mechant,*” answered Helen, hanging her head. “ But come, sir, allow, at least, that if I let my romance, as you call it, run away with me now and then, I can still content myself with the reality. What, you shake your head still! Don’t you remember the sparrow?”

“ Ha! ha! yes—the sparrow that the pedlar sold you for a goldfinch; and you were so proud of your purchase, and wondered so much why you could not coax the goldfinch to sing, till at last the paint wore away, and it was only a poor little sparrow !”

“ Go on! Confess; did I fret, then? Was I not as pleased with my dear sparrow, as I should have been with the prettiest goldfinch that ever sang? Does not the sparrow follow me about, and nestle on my shoulder—dear little thing! And I was right after all; for if I had not fancied it a goldfinch, I should not have bought it, perhaps. But now I would not change it for a goldfinch—no, not even for that nightingale I heard just now. So let me still fancy the poor fair a

bazaar; it is a double pleasure, first to fancy the bazaar, and then to be surprised at the fair."

"You argue well," said the Vicar, as they now entered the village. "I really think, in spite of all your turn for poetry, and Goldsmith, and Cowper, that you would take as kindly to mathematics as your cousin John Ardworth, poor lad!"

"Not if mathematics have made him so grave—and so churlish, I was going to say—but that word does him wrong. Dear cousin, so kind and so rough!"

"It is not mathematics that are to blame, if he is grave and absorbed," said the Vicar, with a sigh; "it is the two cares that gnaw most—poverty and ambition."

"Nay, do not sigh: it must be such a pleasure to feel as he does, that one must triumph at last!"

"Umph!—John must have nearly reached London by this time," said Mr. Fielden, "for he is a stout walker, and this is the third day since he left us. Well, now that he is about fairly to be called to the bar, I hope that his fever will cool, and he will settle calmly to work. I have felt great pain for him during this last visit."

"Pain! But why?"

"My dear, do you remember what I read out to you both from Sir William Temple, the night before John left us?"

Helen put her hand to her brow, and with a readiness which showed a memory equally quick and retentive, replied, "Yes; was it not to this effect? I am not sure of the exact words—'To have something we have not, and be something we are not, is the root of all evil.'"

"Well remembered, my darling!"

"Ah, but," said Helen, archly, "I remember too what my cousin replied—'If Sir William Temple had practised his theory, he would not have been ambassador at the Hague, or——'"

"Pshaw! the boy's always ready enough with his answers," interrupted Mr. Fielden, rather petulantly. "There's the fair, my dear; more in your way, I see, than Sir William Temple's philosophy."

And Helen was right—the fair was no eastern bazaar: but how delighted that young, impressionable mind was, notwithstanding! The swings and the roundabouts, the shows, the booths, even down to the gilt gingerbread kings and queens.

All minds genuinely poetical, are peculiarly susceptible to movement—that is, to the excitement of numbers. If the movement is sincerely joyous, as in the mirth of a village holiday, such a nature shares insensibly in the joy. But if the movement is a false and spurious gaiety, as in a state ball, where the impassive face and languid step are out of harmony with the evident object of the scene—then the nature we speak of feels chilled and dejected. Hence it really is, that the more delicate and ideal order of minds soon grow inexpressibly weary of the hack routine of what are called fashionable pleasures. Hence the same person most alive to a dance on the green, would be without enjoyment at Almack's. It is not because one scene is a village green, and the other a room in King Street; nor is it because the actors in the one are of the humble, in the others of the noble class, but simply because the enjoyment in the first is visible and hearty, because in the other it is a listless and melancholy pretence. Helen fancied it was the swings and the booths that gave her that innocent exhilaration—it was not so; it was the unconscious sympathy with the crowd around her. When the poetical nature

quits its own dreams for the actual world, it enters, and transfuses itself into the hearts and humours of others. The two wings of that spirit which we call Genius, are reverie and sympathy. But poor little Helen had no idea that she had genius. Whether chasing the butterfly, or talking fond fancies to her birds, or whether with earnest, musing eyes, watching the stars come forth, and the dark pine trees gleam into silver; whether with airy day-dreams and credulous wonder poring over the magic tales of Mirglip or Aladdin, or whether spell-bound to awe by the solemn woes of *Lear*, or following the blind great bard into "the heaven of heavens, an earthly guest, to draw empyreal air," she obeyed but the honest and varying impulse in each change of her pliant mood; and would have ascribed with genuine humility to the vagaries of childhood, that prompt gathering of pleasure—that quick shifting sport of the fancy by which Nature binds to itself, in chains undulating as melody, the lively senses of genius.

While Helen, leaning on the Vicar's arm, thus surrendered herself to the innocent excitement of the moment, the Vicar himself smiled and nodded to his parishioners, or paused to exchange a

friendly word or two, with the youngest or the eldest loiterers, (those two extremes of mortality which the Church so tenderly unites,) whom the scene drew to its tempting vortex, when a rough-haired lad, with a leather bag strapped across his waist, turned from one of the gingerbread booths, and touching his hat, said, "Please you, sir, I was a-coming to your house with a letter."

The Vicar's correspondence was confined and rare, despite his distant children, for letters but a few years ago were costly luxuries to persons of narrow income, and therefore the juvenile letter-carrier who plied between the Post town and the village failed to excite in his breast that indignation for being an hour or more behind his time, which would have animated one to whom the Post brings the usual event of the day. He took the letter from the boy's hand, and paid for it with a thrifty sigh, as he glanced at a handwriting unfamiliar to him—perhaps from some clergyman poorer than himself. However, that was not the place to read letters, so he put the epistle in his pocket, until Helen, who watched his countenance to see when he grew tired of the scene, kindly proposed to return home. As they gained a stile

half way, Mr. Fielden remembered his letter, took it forth, and put on his spectacles. Helen stooped over the bank to gather violets; the Vicar seated himself on the stile. As he again looked at the address, the handwriting, before unfamiliar, seemed to grow indistinctly on his recollection. That bold, firm hand—thin and fine as woman's, but large and regular as man's—was too peculiar to be forgotten. He uttered a brief exclamation of surprise and recognition, and hastily broke the seal. The contents ran thus:—

“DEAR SIR,

“So many years have passed since any communication has taken place between us, that the name of Lucretia Dalibard will seem more strange to you than that of Lucretia Clavering. I have recently returned to England after long residence abroad. I perceive by my deceased sister's will that she has confided her only daughter to my guardianship, conjointly with yourself. I am anxious to participate in that tender charge. I am alone in the world—an habitual sufferer—afflicted with a partial paralysis that deprives me of the use of my limbs. In such circumstances, it is the more natural that I should turn to the

only relative left me. My journey to England has so exhausted my strength, and all movement is so painful, that I must request you to excuse me for not coming in person for my niece. Your benevolence, however, will, I am sure, prompt you to afford me the comfort of her society, as soon as you can contrive some suitable arrangement for her journey. Begging you to express to Helen, in my name, the assurance of such a welcome as is due from me to my sister's child, and waiting with great anxiety your reply,

“I am, dear Sir, your very faithful servant,

“LUCRETIA DALIBARD.”

“P.S.—I can scarcely venture to ask you to bring Helen yourself to town, but I should be glad if other inducements to take the journey afforded me the pleasure of seeing you once again. I am anxious, in addition to such details of my late sister as you may be enabled to give me, to learn something of the history of her connexion, Mr. Ardworth, in whom I felt much interested years ago, and who, I am recently informed, left an infant, his supposed son, under your care. So long absent from England, how much have I to learn, and how little the mere gravestones tell us of the dead!”

While the Vicar is absorbed in this letter, equally unwelcome and unexpected,—while, unconscious as the daughter of Ceres gathering flowers when the Hell King drew near, of the change that awaited her and the grim presence that approached on her fate,—Helen bends still over the bank odorous with shrinking violets, we turn where the new generation equally invites our gaze, and make our first acquaintance with two persons connected with the progress of our tale.

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The britska stopped. The servant, who had been gradually accumulating present dust and future rheumatisms on the ‘bad eminence’ of a rumble-tumble, exposed to the nipping airs of an English sky, leapt to the ground, and opened the carriage door.

“This is the best place for the view, sir—a little to the right.”

Percival St. John threw aside his book, (a volume of *Voyages*,) whistled to a spaniel dozing by his side, and descended lightly. Light was the

step of the young man, and merry was the bark of the dog, as it chased from the road the startled sparrow, rising high into the clear air—favourites of Nature both, man and dog !

You had but to glance at Percival St. John, to know at once that he was of the race that toils not; the assured step spoke confidence in the world's fair smile. No care for the morrow dimmed the bold eye and the radiant bloom.

About the middle height—his slight figure, yet undeveloped, seemed not to have attained to its full growth—the darkening down only just shaded a cheek somewhat sunburnt, though naturally fair, round which locks black as jet played sportively in the fresh air—about him altogether there was the inexpressible charm of happy youth. He scarcely looked sixteen, though above four years older; but for his firm though careless step, and the open fearlessness of his frank eye, you might have almost taken him for a girl in men's clothes, not from effeminacy of feature, but from the sparkling bloom of his youth, and from his unmistakable newness to the cares and sins of man. A more delightful vision of ingenuous boyhood opening into life, under happy auspices, never inspired with

pleased yet melancholy interest the eye of half envious, half pitying age.

“And that,” mused Percival St. John—“that is London! Oh, for the Diable Boiteux to unroof me those distant houses, and show me the pleasures that lurk within!—Ah, what long letters I shall have to write home!—How the dear old Captain will laugh over them, and how my dear good mother will put down her work and sigh! Home!—Um,—I miss it already. How strange and grim, after all, the huge city seems!”

His glove fell to the ground, and his spaniel mumbled it into shreds. The young man laughed, and, throwing himself on the grass, played gaily with the dog.

“Fie, Beau, sir,—fie; gloves are indigestible. Restrain your appetite, and we’ll lunch together at the Clarendon.”

At this moment there arrived at the same patch of greensward a pedestrian some years older than Percival St. John—a tall, muscular, raw-boned, dust-covered, travel-stained pedestrian—one of your pedestrians in good earnest—no amateur in neat gambroon, manufactured by Inkson, who leaves his carriage behind him, and walks on with

his fishing-rod by choice, but a sturdy wanderer, with thick shoes and strapless trousers, a thread-bare coat and a knapsack at his back. Yet withal, the young man had the air of a gentleman ; not gentleman as the word is understood in St. James's, the gentleman of the noble and idle class, but the gentleman as the title is accorded, by courtesy, to all to whom both education and the habit of mixing with educated persons gives a claim to the distinction and imparts an air of refinement. The new comer was strongly built, at once lean and large—far more strongly built than Percival St. John, but without his look of cheerful and comely health. His complexion had not the florid hues that should have accompanied that strength of body ; it was pale, though not sickly ; the expression grave, the lines deep, the face strongly marked. By his side trotted painfully a wiry, yellowish, foot-sore Scotch terrier. Beau sprang from his master's caress, cocked his handsome head on one side, and suspended in silent halt his right fore-paw. Percival cast over his left shoulder a careless glance at the intruder. The last heeded neither Beau nor Percival. He slipped his knapsack to the ground, and the Scotch

terrier sank upon it, and curled himself up into a ball. The wayfarer folded his arms tightly upon his breast, heaved a short unquiet sigh, and cast over the giant city, from under deep-pent lowering brows, a look so earnest, so searching, so full of inexpressible, dogged, determined power, that Percival, roused out of his gay indifference, rose and regarded him with curious interest.

In the meanwhile Beau had very leisurely approached the bilious-looking terrier; and after walking three times round him, with a stare and a small sniff of superb impertinence, halted with great composure, and lifting his hind leg—O Beau, Beau, Beau! your historian blushes for your breeding, and, like Sterne's recording angel, drops a tear upon the stain which washes it from the register—but not, alas! from the back of the bilious terrier! The space around was wide, Beau. You had all the world to choose; why select so specially for insult the single spot on which reposed the worn-out and unoffending? O, dainty Beau! —O, dainty world! Own the truth, both of ye. There is something irresistibly provocative of insult in the back of a shabby-looking dog!

The poor terrier, used to affronts, raised its

heavy eyelids, and shot the gleam of just indignation from its dark eyes. But it neither stirred nor growled, and Beau, extremely pleased with his achievement, wagged his tail in triumph, and returned to his master—perhaps, in parliamentary phrase, to ‘report proceedings, and ask leave to sit again.’

“I wonder,” soliloquized Percival St. John, “what that poor fellow is thinking of;—perhaps he *is* poor, indeed!—no doubt of it, now I look again. And I so rich! I should like to—hem—let’s see what he’s made of.”

Herewith Percival approached, and with all a boy’s half bashful, half saucy frankness, said—“A fine prospect, sir.”

The pedestrian started, and threw a rapid glance over the brilliant figure that accosted him. Percival St. John was not to be abashed by stern looks; but that glance might have abashed many a more experienced man. The glance of a squire upon a corn law missionary, of a Crockford dandy upon a Regent Street tiger, could not have been more disdainful.

“Tush!” said the pedestrian, rudely, and turned upon his heel.

Percival coloured, and, shall we own it? was boy enough to double his fist. Little would he have been deterred by the brawn of those great arms and the girth of that Herculean chest, if he had been quite sure that it was a proper thing to resent pugilistically so discourteous a monosyllable. The "tush!" stuck greatly in his throat. But the man, now removed to the farther verge of the hill, looked so tranquil and so lost in thought, that the short-lived anger died.

"And after all, if I was as poor as he looks, I dare say I should be just as proud," muttered Percival. "However, it's his own fault if he goes to London on foot, when I might, at least, have given him a lift. Come, Beau, sir."

With his face still a little flushed, and his hat, unconsciously, cocked fiercely on one side, Percival sauntered back to his britska.

As in a whirl of dust, the light carriage was borne by the four posters down the hill, the pedestrian turned for an instant from the view before to the cloud behind, and muttered—"Ay, a fine prospect for the rich—a noble field for the poor!" The tone in which those words were said told volumes; there, spoke the pride, the hope, the

energy, the ambition, which make youth laborious, manhood prosperous, age renowned.

The stranger then threw himself on the sward, and continued his silent and intent contemplation till the clouds grew red in the west. When, then, he rose, his eye was bright, his mien erect, and a smile, playing round his firm, full lips, stole the moody sternness from his hard face. Throwing his knapsack once more on his back, John Ardworth went resolutely on to the great vortex.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE CORONATION.

THE eighth of September, 1831, was a holiday in London. William the Fourth received the crown of his ancestors in that mighty church, in which the most impressive monitors to human pomp are the monuments of the dead: the dust of conquerors and statesmen, of the wise heads and the bold hands that had guarded the thrones of departed kings, slept around; and the great men of the Modern time were assembled in homage to the monarch, to whom the prowess and the liberty of generations had bequeathed an empire in which the sun never sets. In the Abbey—thinking little of the past, caring little for the future—the immense audience gazed eagerly on the pageant that occurs but once in that division

of history—the lifetime of a king. The assemblage was brilliant and imposing. The galleries sparkled with the gems of women who still upheld the celebrity for form and feature, which, from the remotest times, has been awarded to the great English race. Below, in their robes and coronets, were men who neither in the senate nor the field have shamed their fathers. Conspicuous amongst all, for grandeur of mien and stature, towered the brothers of the king; while commanding yet more the universal gaze, were seen, here the eagle features of the old hero of Waterloo, and there the majestic brow of the haughty statesman who was leading the people (while the last of the Bourbons, whom Waterloo had restored to the Tuilleries, had left the orb and purple to the kindred house, so fatal to his name,) through a stormy and perilous transition to a bloodless revolution and a new charter.

Tier upon tier, in the division set apart for them, the members of the Lower House moved and murmured above the pageant; and the coronation of the new sovereign was connected in their minds with the great measure, which, still undecided, made at that time a link between the People and the King; and arrayed against both,

if not, indeed, the real Aristocracy, at least the Chamber recognised by the Constitution as its representative. Without the space, was one dense mass. Houses, from balcony to balcony, window to window, were filled as some immense theatre. Up, through the long thoroughfare to Whitehall, the eye saw that audience—A PEOPLE; and the gaze was bounded at the spot where Charles the First had passed from the banquet-house to the scaffold.

The ceremony was over; the procession had swept slowly by; the last huzza had died away. And, after staring awhile upon Orator Hunt, who had clambered up the iron palisade near Westminster Hall, to exhibit his goodly person in his court attire, the serried crowds hurrying from the shower which then unseasonably descended, broke into large masses or lengthening columns.

In that part of London which may be said to form a boundary between its old and its new world, by which, on the one hand, you pass to Westminster, or through that gorge of the Strand which leads along endless rows of shops that have grown up on the sites of the ancient halls of the Salisburys and the Exeters, the Buckinghams and Southamptons, to the heart of the City, built around the primeval palace of the "Tower,"—while,

on the other hand, you pass into the new city of aristocracy and letters, of art and fashion, embracing the whilom chase of Marylebone, and the once sedge-grown waters of Pimlico ;—by this ignoble boundary, (the crossing from the Opera House, at the bottom of the Haymarket to the commencement of Charing Cross,) stood a person whose discontented countenance was in singular contrast with the general gaiety and animation of the day. This person, O gentle reader—this sour, querulous, discontented person—was a king, too, in his own walk! None might dispute it. He feared no rebel; he was harassed by no reform; he ruled without ministers. Tools he had; but, when worn out, he replaced them without a pension or a sigh. He lived by taxes—but they were voluntary; and his Civil List was supplied, without demand for the redress of grievances. This person, nevertheless—not deposed, was suspended from his empire for the day. He was pushed aside; he was forgotten. He was not distinct from the crowd. Like Titus, he had lost a day—his vocation was gone. This person was the Sweeper of the Crossing!

He was a character! He was young, in the

fairest prime of youth ; but it was the face of an old man on young shoulders. His hair was long, thin, and prematurely streaked with grey ; his face was pale, and deeply furrowed ; his eyes hollow, and their stare gleamed, cold and stolid, under his bent and shaggy brows. The figure was at once fragile and ungainly—and the narrow shoulders curved in a perpetual stoop. It was a person once noticed that you would easily remember, and associate with some undefined, painful impression. The manner was humble, but not meek ; the voice was whining, but without pathos. There was a meagre, passionless, dulness about the aspect, though, at times, it quickened into a kind of avid acuteness. No one knew by what human parentage this personage came into the world. He had been reared by the charity of a stranger, crept through childhood, and misery, and rags mysteriously ; and suddenly succeeded an old defunct negro in the profitable crossing whereat he is now standing. All education was unknown to him, so was all love. In those festive haunts at St. Giles's, where he who would see 'Life in London' may often discover the boy who has held his horse in the morning, dancing merrily

with his chosen damsel at night, our sweeper's character was austere as Charles the Twelfth's! And, the poor creature had his good qualities! He was sensitively alive to kindness—little enough had been shown him to make the luxury the more prized from its rarity!—though fond of money, he would part with it (we do not say cheerfully, but part with it still) not to mere want, indeed (for he had been too pinched and starved himself, and had grown too obtuse to pinching and to starving for the sensitiveness that prompts to charity), but to any of his companions who had done him a good service, or who had even warmed his dull heart by a friendly smile; he was honest, too—honest to the backbone. You might have trusted him with gold untold. Through the heavy clod which man's care had not moulded, nor books enlightened, nor the priest's solemn lore informed, still natural rays from the great parent source of Deity struggled, fitful and dim. He had no lawful name; none knew if sponsors had ever stood security for his sins at the sacred fount. But he had christened himself by the strange, unchristianlike name of "Beck." There he was, then, seemingly without origin, parentage, or kindred tie—a lonesome,

squalid, bloodless thing, which the great monster, London, seemed to have spawned forth of its own self—one of its sickly, miserable, rickety offspring, whom it puts out at nurse to Penury, at school to Starvation, and, finally, and literally gives them stones for bread, with the option of the gallows or the dunghill, when the desperate offspring calls on the giant mother for return and home !

And this creature did love something—loved, perhaps, some fellow-being—of that hereafter, when we dive into the secrets of his privacy. Meanwhile, openly and frankly, he loved his crossing ; he was proud of his crossing ; he was grateful to his crossing. God help thee, son of the street, why not ! He had in it a double affection ; that of serving and being served. He kept the crossing—if the crossing kept him. He smiled at times to himself when he saw it lie fair and brilliant amidst the mire around ; it bestowed on him a sense of property ! What a man may feel for a fine estate in a ring fence, Beck felt for that isthmus of the kennel which was subject to his broom ! The Coronation had made one rebellious spirit, when it swept the sweeper from his crossing.

He stood then half under the Colonnade of the Opera House, as the crowd now rapidly grew thinner and more scattered; and when the last carriage of a long string of vehicles had passed by, he muttered audibly—

“It’ll take a deal of pains to make she right agin!”

“So you be’s ere to-day, Beck!” said a ragamuffin boy, who, pushing and scrambling through his betters, now halted, and wiped his forehead as he looked at the sweeper. “Vy, ve are all out pleasuring. Vy vont you come with ve?—lots of fun!”

The sweeper scowled at the urchin, and made no answer, but began sedulously to apply himself to the crossing.

“Vy, there isn’t another sweep in the streets, Beck. His Majesty King Bill’s Currnation makes all on us so appy!”

“It has made *she* unkimmon dirty!” returned Beck, pointing to the dingy crossing, scarce distinguished from the rest of the road.

The ragamuffin laughed.

“But ve be’s a goin’ to ave Reform now, Beck. The peopul’s to have their rights and libties, hand

the luds is to be put down, hand beefsteaks is to be a penny a pound, and ——”

“What good will that do to she?”

“Vy, man, ve shall take turn about, and sum vun helse will sveep the crossings, and ve shall ride in sum vun helse’s coach and four prads—cos vy? ve shall hall be hequals!”

“Hequals! I tells you vot, if you keeps jawing there, atween me and she, I shall vop you, Joe—cos vy—I be’s the biggest!” was the answer of Beck the sweeper to Joe the ragamuffin.

The jovial Joe laughed aloud, snapped his fingers, threw up his ragged cap with a shout for King Bill, and set off scampering and whooping to join those festivities which Beck had so churlishly disdained.

Time crept on—evening began to close in, and Beck was still at his crossing, when a young gentleman on horseback, who, after seeing the procession, had stolen away for a quiet ride in the suburbs, reined in close by the crossing, and, looking round, as for some one to hold his horse, could discover no loiterer worthy that honour except the solitary Beck. So young was the rider, that he seemed still a boy. On his smooth

countenance, all that most prepossesses in early youth left its witching stamp. A smile, at once gay and sweet, played on his lips. There was a charm, even in a certain impatient petulance, in his quick eye, and the slight contraction of his delicate brows. Almaviva might well have been jealous of such a page! He was the *beau idéal* of Cherubino. He held up his whip, with an arch sign, to the sweeper. "Follow, my man," he said, in a tone, the very command of which sounded gentle, so blithe was the movement of the lips, and so silvery the easy accent; and, without waiting, he cantered carelessly down Pall Mall.

The sweeper cast a rueful glance at his melancholy domain. But he had gained but little that day, and the offer was too tempting to be rejected. He heaved a sigh, shouldered his broom, and murmuring to himself that he would give her a last brush before he retired for the night, he put his long limbs into that swinging, shambling trot, which characterizes the motion of those professional jackals, who, having once caught sight of a groomless rider, fairly hunt him down, and appear when he least expects it, the instant he dismounts.

The young rider lightly swung himself from his sleek, high-bred grey, at the door of one of the clubs in St. James's Street, patted his horse's neck, chucked the rein to the sweeper, and sauntered into the house, whistling, musically—if not from want of thought, certainly from want of care.

As he entered the club, two or three men, young, indeed, but much older, to appearance, at least, than himself, who were dining together at the same table, nodded to him their friendly greeting.

"Ah, Perce," said one, "we have only just sat down—here is a seat for you."

The boy blushed shyly, as he accepted the proposal, and the young men made room for him at the table, with a smiling alacrity which showed that his shyness was no hindrance to his popularity."

"Who," said an elderly dandy, dining apart with one of his contemporaries—"who is that lad? One ought not to admit such mere boys into the club."

"He is the only surviving son of an old friend of ours," answered the other, dropping his eyeglass. "Young Percival St. John."

"St. John! What! Vernon St. John's son?"

"Yes."

“He has not his father’s good air. These young fellows have a tone—a something—a want of self-possession, eh?”

“Very true. The fact is, that Percival was meant for the navy, and even served as a mid. for a year or so. He was a younger son, then—third, I think. The two elder ones died, and Master Percival walked into the inheritance. I don’t think he is quite of age yet.”

“Of age! he does not look seventeen!”

“Oh, he is more than that! I remember him in his jacket at Laughton. A fine property!”

“Ay, I don’t wonder those fellows are so civil to him. This claret is corked!—everything is so bad at this d—d club!—no wonder, when a troop of boys are let in!—enough to spoil any club!—don’t know Larose from Lafitte. Waiter!”

Meanwhile, the talk round the table, at which sate Percival St. John, was animated, lively, and various—the talk common with young idlers; of horses, and steeple-chases, and opera-dancers, and reigning beauties, and good-humoured jests at each other. In all this babble, there was a *naïve* freshness about Percival St. John’s conversation, which

showed that, as yet, for him life had the zest of novelty. He was more at home about horses and steeple-chases, than about opera-dancers, and beauties, and the small scandals of town. Talk on these latter topics did not seem to interest him ; on the contrary, almost to pain. Shy and modest as a girl, he coloured or looked aside when his more hardened friends boasted of assignations and love-affairs. Spirited, gay, and manly enough in all really manly points, the virgin bloom of innocence was yet visible in his frank charming manner. And often, out of respect for his delicacy, some hearty son of pleasure stopped short in his narrative, or lost the point of his anecdote ; and yet so loveable was Percival in his good-humour, his *naïveté*, his joyous entrance into innocent joy, that his companions were scarcely conscious of the *gêne* and restraint he imposed on them. Those merry, dark eyes, and that flashing smile, were conviviality of themselves. They brought with them a contagious cheerfulness, which compensated for the want of corruption.

Night had set in. St. John's companions had departed to their several haunts, and Percival

himself stood on the steps of the club, resolving that he would join the crowds that swept through the streets to gaze on the illuminations, when he perceived Beck, (still at the rein of his dozing horse,) whom he had quite forgot till that moment. Laughing at his own want of memory, Percival put some silver into Beck's hand—more silver than Beck had ever before received for similar service—and said :

“ Well, my man, I suppose I can trust you to take my horse to his stables—No. —, the Mews, behind Curzon Street. Poor fellow, he wants his supper,—and you, too, I suppose !”

Beck smiled—a pale, hungry smile, and pulled his forelock politely—“ I can take the oss werry safely, your onor.”

“ Take him, then, and good evening ; but don't get on, for your life.”

“ Oh, no, sir ; I never gets on : 'taint in my vays.”

And Beck slowly led the horse through the crowd, till he vanished from Percival's eyes.

Just then, a man passing through the street, paused, as he saw the young gentleman on the steps of the club, and said, gaily, “ Ah ! how do

you do? Pretty faces in plenty out to-night! Which way are you going?"

"That is more than I can tell you, Mr. Varney. I was just thinking which turn to take—the right or the left."

"Then let me be your guide," and Varney offered his arm.

Percival accepted the courtesy; and the two walked on towards Piccadilly. Many a kind glance from the milliners and maid-servants, whom the illuminations drew abroad, roved, somewhat impartially, towards St. John and his companion; but they dwelt longer on the last, for *there*, at least, they were sure of a return. Varney, if not in his first youth, was still in the prime of life; and Time had dealt with him so leniently, that he retained all the personal advantages of youth itself. His complexion still was clear; and as only his upper lip, decorated with a slight, silken, and well-trimmed moustache, was unshaven, the contour of the face added to the juvenility of his appearance by the rounded symmetry it betrayed. His hair escaped from his hat in fair unchanged luxuriance. And the nervous figure, agile as a panther's, though broad-should-

dered and deep-chested, denoted all the slightness and elasticity of twenty-five, combined with the muscular power of forty. His dress was rather fantastic—too showy for the good taste which is habitual to the English gentleman—and there was a peculiarity in his gait almost approaching to a strut, which bespoke a desire of effect—a consciousness of personal advantages—equally opposed to the mien and manner of Percival's usual companions; yet withal, even the most fastidious would have hesitated to apply to Gabriel Varney the epithet of 'vulgar.' Many turned to look again; but it was not to remark the dress, or the slight swagger:—an expression of reckless, sinister power in the countenance—something of vigour and determination even in that very walk, foppish as it would have been in most, made you sink all observation of the mere externals, in a sentiment of curiosity towards the man himself. He seemed a somebody—not a somebody of conventional rank, but a somebody of personal individuality—an artist perhaps, a poet, or a soldier in some foreign service, but certainly a man whose name you would expect to have heard of. Amongst the common

mob of passengers he stood out in marked and distinct relief.

"I feel at home in a crowd," said Varney.
"Do you understand me?"

"I think so," answered Percival. "If ever I could become distinguished, I, too, should feel at home in a crowd."

"You have ambition, then? you mean to become distinguished?" asked Varney, with a sharp, searching look.

There was a deeper and steadier flash than usual from Percival's dark eyes, and a manlier glow over his cheek, at Varney's question. But he was slow in answering; and when he did so, his manner had all its wonted mixture of graceful bashfulness and gay candour.

"Our rise does not always depend on ourselves. We are not all born great, nor do we all have 'greatness thrust on us.' Shakespeare—hem!"

"One can be what one likes, with your fortune," said Varney; and there was a growl of envy in his voice.

"What, a painter like you! Ha, ha!"

"Faith," said Varney, "at least, if you could

paint at all, you would have what I have not—praise and fame.”

Percival pressed kindly on Varney’s arm. “Courage! you will get justice some day!”

Varney shook his head. “Bah! there is no such thing as justice; all are underrated or over-rated. Can you name one man whom you think is estimated by the public at his precise value? As for present popularity, it depends on two qualities—each singly, or both united—cowardice and charlatanism; that is, servile compliance with the taste and opinion of the moment, or a quack’s spasmodic efforts at originality. But why bore you on such matters! There are things more attractive round us. A good ancle that, eh? Why, pardon me, it is strange; but you don’t seem to care much for women?”

“Oh, yes, I do,” said Percival, with a sly demureness. “I am very fond of—my mother!”

“Very proper and filial,” said Varney, laughing, “and does your love for the sex stop there?”

“Well, and in truth I fancy so—pretty nearly. You know my grandmother is not alive! But *that* is something really worth looking at!” And Percival pointed, almost with a child’s de-

light, at an illumination more brilliant than the rest.

"I suppose, when you come of age, you will have all the cedars at Laughton hung with coloured lamps. Ah, you must ask me there, some day. I should so like to see the old place again."

"You never saw it, I think you say, in my poor father's time?"

"Never."

"Yet you knew him."

"But slightly."

"And you never saw my mother?"

"No; but she seems to have such influence over you, that I am sure she must be a very superior person—rather proud, I suppose."

"Proud—no; that is, not exactly proud, for she is very meek and very affable. But yet——"

"But yet—you hesitate—she would not like you to be seen, perhaps, walking in Piccadilly with Gabriel Varney, the natural son of old Sir Miles's librarian,—Gabriel Varney the painter—Gabriel Varney the adventurer!"

"As long as Gabriel Varney is a man without stain on his character and honour, my mother would only be pleased that I should know an able

and accomplished person, whatever his origin or parentage. But my mother would be sad if she knew me intimate with a Bourbon or a Raffaele, the first in rank or the first in genius, if either prince or artist had lost or even sullied his 'scutcheon of gentleman. In a word, she is most sensitive as to honour and conscience—all else she disregards."

"Hem!" Varney stooped down, as if examining the polish of his boot, while he continued, carelessly—"Impossible to walk the streets and keep one's boots out of the mire! Well—and you agree with your mother?"

"It would be strange if I did not. When I was scarcely four years old, my poor father used to lead me through the long picture-gallery at Laughton, and say, 'Walk through life as if those brave gentlemen looked down on you.' And," added St. John, with his ingenuous smile—"my mother would put in her word—'And those unstained women, too, my Percival!'"

There was something noble and touching in the boy's low accents as he said this; it gave the key to his unusual modesty, and his frank, healthful innocence of character.

The devil in Varney's lip sneered mockingly.

"My young friend, you have never loved yet.—
Do you think you ever shall?"

"I have dreamed that I could love one day.
But I can wait."

Varney was about to reply, when he was accosted abruptly by three men of that exaggerated style of dress and manner, which is implied by the vulgar appellation of 'Tigrish.' Each of the three men had a cigar in his mouth—each seemed flushed with wine. One wore long brass spurs, and immense moustaches; another was distinguished by an enormous surface of black satin cravat, across which meandered a Pactolus of gold chain; a third had his coat laced and braided, *à la Polonaise*, and pinched and padded *à la Russe*, with trousers shaped to the calf of a sinewy leg, and a glass screwed into his right eye."

"Ah, Gabriel!—ah, Varney!—ah, prince of good fellows, well met! You sup with us to-night at little *Celeste's*—we were just going in search of you."

"Who's your friend—one of us?" whispered a second.

And the third screwed his arm tight and lovingly into Varney's.

Gabriel, despite his habitual assurance, looked abashed for a moment, and would have extricated himself from cordialities not at that moment welcome; but he saw that his friends were too far gone in their cups to be easily shaken off, and he felt relieved when Percival, after a dissatisfied glance at the three, said, quietly—"I must detain you no longer—I shall soon look in at your studio;" and, without waiting for answer, slid off, and was lost among the crowd.

Varney walked on with his new-found friends, unheeding for some moments their loose remarks and familiar banter. At length he shook off his abstraction, and surrendering himself to the coarse humours of his companions, soon eclipsed them all by the gusto of his slang and the mocking profligacy of his sentiments; for here he no longer played a part, or suppressed his grosser instincts. That uncurbed dominion of the senses, to which his very boyhood had abandoned itself, found a willing slave in the man. Even the talents themselves that he displayed came from the cultivation of the sensual. His eye, studying externals, made

him a painter—his ear, quick and practised, a musician. His wild, prodigal fancy rioted on every excitement, and brought him in a vast harvest of experience in knowledge of the frailties and the vices on which it indulged its vagrant experiments. Men who over-cultivate the art that connects itself with the senses, with little counterpoise from the reason and pure intellect, are apt to be dissipated and irregular in their lives. This is frequently noticeable in the biographies of musicians, singers and painters, less so in poets, because he who deals with words, not signs, and tones, must perpetually compare his senses with the pure images of which the senses only see the appearances ; in a word, he must employ his intellect, and his self-education must be large and comprehensive. But with most real genius, however fed merely by the senses—most really great painters, singers, and musicians, however easily led astray into temptation, the richness of the soil throws up abundant good qualities to countervail or redeem the evil—they are usually compassionate, generous, sympathizing. That Varney had not such beauties of soul and temperament it is unnecessary to

add—principally, it is true, because of his nurture, education, parental example, the utter corruption in which his childhood and youth had passed—partly because he had no *real* genius: it was a false apparition of the divine spirit, reflected from the exquisite perfection of his frame, (which rendered all his senses so vigorous and acute,) and his riotous fancy, and his fitful energy, which was capable at times of great application, but not of definite purpose or earnest study. All about him was flashy and hollow. He had not the natural subtlety and depth of mind that had characterized his terrible father. The graft of the opera dancer was visible on the stock of the scholar: wholly without the habits of method and order, without the patience, without the mathematical, calculating brain of Dalibard, he played wantonly with the horrible and loathsome wickedness of which Olivier had made dark and solemn study. Extravagant and lavish, he spent money as fast as he gained it; he threw away all chances of eminence and career. In the midst of the direst plots of his villany, or the most energetic pursuit of his art, the poorest excitement, the veriest bauble would draw him aside. His

heart was with Falri in the sty, his fancy with Aladdin in the palace. To make a show was his darling object: he loved to create effect by his person, his talk, his dress, as well as by his talents. Living from hand to mouth, crimes through which it is not our intention to follow him, had at times made him rich to-day, for vices to make him poor again to-morrow. What he called 'luck,' or 'his star,' had favoured him—he *was not hanged!*—he lived; and, as the greater part of his unscrupulous career had been conducted in foreign lands, and under other names,—in his own name, and in his own country, though something scarcely to be defined, but equivocal and provocative of suspicion, made him displeasing to the prudent, and vaguely alarmed the experience of the sober,—still no positive accusation was attached to the general integrity of his character; and the mere dissipation of his habits was naturally little known out of his familiar circle. Hence, he had the most presumptuous confidence in himself—a confidence native to his courage, and confirmed by his experience. His conscience was so utterly obtuse, that he might almost be said to present the

phenomenon of a man without conscience at all. Unlike Conrad, he did not "know himself a villain;" all that he knew of himself was, that he was a remarkably clever fellow, without prejudice or superstition. That, with all his gifts, he had not succeeded better in life, he ascribed carelessly to the surpassing wisdom of his philosophy. He could have done better if he had enjoyed himself less—but was not enjoyment the be all and end all of this little life? More often, indeed, in the moods of his bitter envy, he would lay the fault upon the world. How great he could have been if he had been rich and high born! Oh, he was made to spend, not to save—to command, not to fawn! He was not formed to plod through the dull mediocrities of fortune; he must toss up for the All or the Nothing! It was no control over himself that made Varney now turn his thoughts from certain grave designs on Percival Saint John, to the brutal debauchery of his three companions,—rather he then yielded most to his natural self. And when the morning star rose over the night he passed with low profligates and venal nymphs,—when, over the fragments on the board and emptied bottles, and drunken riot, dawn gleamed and saw him in all the pride of his magnificent orga-

nization, and the cynicism of his measured vice;—fair, fresh, and blooming amidst those maudlin eyes, and flushed cheeks, and reeling figures;—laughing hideously over the spectacle he had provoked, and kicking aside, with a devil's scorn, the prostrate form of the favoured partner whose head had rested on his bosom, as alone with a steady step he passed the threshold, and walked into the fresh, healthful air;—Gabriel Varney enjoyed the fell triumph of his hell-born vanity, and revelled in his sentiment of superiority and power.

Meanwhile, on quitting Warney, young Percival strolled on as the whim directed him. Turning down the Haymarket, he gained the colonnade of the Opera House. The crowd there was so dense that his footsteps were arrested, and he leant against one of the columns in admiration of the various galaxies in view. In front blazed the rival stars of the United Service Club and the Athenæum;—to the left, the quaint and peculiar device which lighted up Northumberland House;—to the right, the anchors, cannons, and bombs, which typified ingeniously the martial attributes of the Ordnance Office.

At that moment there were three persons connected with this narrative within a few feet

of each other, distinguished from the multitude by the feelings with which each regarded the scene and felt the jostle of the crowd. Percival St. John, in whom the harmless sense of pleasure was yet vivid and unsatiated, caught from the assemblage only that physical hilarity which heightened his own spirits. If in a character as yet so undeveloped—to which the large passions and stern ends of life were as yet unknown—stirred some deeper and more musing thoughts and speculations, giving gravity to the habitual smile on his rosy lip, and steadying the play of his sparkling eyes, he would have been at a loss himself to explain the dim sentiment, and the vague desire.

Screened by another column from the pressure of the mob, with his arms folded on his breast, a man some few years older in point of time—many years older in point of character—gazed (with thoughts how turbulent—with ambition how profound!) upon the dense and dark masses that covered space and street far as the eye could reach. He, indeed, could not have said, with Varney, that he was “at home in a crowd.” For a crowd did not fill him with the sense of his own individual being and importance, but grappled him to its mighty breast with the thousand tissues

of a common destiny. Who shall explain and disentangle those high, and restless, and interwoven emotions with which intellectual ambition, honourable and ardent, gazes upon that solemn thing with which, in which, for which it lives and labours—the Human Multitude? To that abstracted, solitary man, the illumination, the festivity, the curiosity, the holiday, were nothing, or but as fleeting phantoms and vain seemings. In his heart's eye, he saw before him but the PEOPLE, the shadow of an everlasting audience—audience at once and judge.

And literally touching him as he stood, the ragged sweeper, who had returned in vain to devote a last care to his beloved charge, stood arrested with the rest, gazing joylessly on the blazing lamps, dead as the stones he heeded, to the young vivacity of the one man, the solemn visions of the other. So, O London, amidst the universal holiday to monarch and to mob, in those three souls lived the three elements, which, duly mingled and administered, make thy vice and thy virtue—thy glory and thy shame—thy labour and thy luxury; pervading the palace and the street—the hospital and the prison;—enjoyment, which is pleasure—energy, which is action—torpor, which is want!

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

SUDDENLY across the gaze of Percival St. John there flashed a face that woke him from his abstraction, as a light awakes the sleeper. It was as a recognition of something seen dimly before—a truth coming out from a dream. It was not the mere beauty of that face, (and beautiful it was,) that arrested his eye and made his heart beat more quickly—it was rather that nameless and inexplicable sympathy which constitutes love at first sight;—a sort of impulse and instinct common to the dullest as the quickest—the hardest reason as the liveliest fancy. Plain Cobbett, seeing before the cottage door, at her homeliest of house work, the girl of whom he said—“That girl should be my wife;” and Dante, first thrilled by the vision of Beatrice, are alike true types of a common ex-

perience : Whatever of love sinks the deepest is felt at first sight ; it streams on us abrupt from the cloud—a lightning flash—a destiny revealed to us face to face.

Now, there was nothing poetical in the place or the circumstance, still less in the companionship in which this fair creature startled the virgin heart of that careless boy ; she was leaning on the arm of a stout, rosy-faced matron in a puce-coloured gown, who was flanked on the other side by a very small, very spare man, with a very wee face, the lower part of which was enveloped in an immense belcher. Besides these two incumbrances, the stout lady contrived to carry in her hands an umbrella, a basket, and a pair of pattens.

In the midst of the strange, unfamiliar emotion which his eye conveyed to his heart, Percival's ear was displeasingly jarred by the loud, bluff, hearty voice of the girl's female companion—

“ Gracious me ! if that is not John Ardworth ; who'd have thought it ! Why, John—I say, John ! ” and lifting her umbrella horizontally, she poked aside two city clerks in front of her, wheeled round the little man on her left, upon whom the

clerks simultaneously bestowed the appellation of "feller," and driving him, as being the sharpest and thinnest wedge at hand, through a dense knot of some half a dozen gapers, while following his involuntary progress she looked defiance on the malcontents, she succeeded in clearing her way to the spot where stood the young man she had discovered. The ambitious dreamer, for it was he, thus detected and disturbed, looked embarrassed for a moment, as the stout lady, touching him with the umbrella, said—

"Well, I declare, if this is not too bad! You sent word that you should not be able to come out with us to see the 'luminations, and here you are as large as life!"

"I did not think, at the moment you wrote to me, that——"

"Oh, stuff!" interrupted the stout woman, with a significant, good-humoured shake of her head, "I know what's what; tell the truth, and shame the gentleman who objects to showing his feet. You are a wild fellow, John Ardworth—you are! you like looking after the pretty faces—you do—you do—ha, ha, ha! very natural! So did you once—did not you, Mr. Mivers—did not you, eh!"

men must be men—they always are men, and it's my belief that men they always *will* be !”

With this sage conjecture into the future, the lady turned to Mr. Mivers, who, thus appealed to, extricated with some difficulty his chin from the folds of his belcher, and, putting up his small face, said, in a small voice—“ Yes, I was a wild fellow once, but you have tamed me !—you have, Mrs. M.”

And therewith the chin sunk again into the belcher, and the small voice died into a small sigh.

The stout lady glanced benignly at her spouse, and then resuming her address, to which Ardworth listened with a half frown and a half smile, observed, encouragingly—

“ Yes, there's nothing like a lawful wife, to break a man in, as you will find some day. Howsomever, your time's not come for the Altar, so suppose you give Helen your arm, and come with us.”

“ Do,” said Helen, in a sweet, coaxing voice.

Ardworth bent down his rough, earnest face to Helen's, and an evident pleasure relaxed its thoughtful lines. “ I cannot resist you,” he be-

gan, and then he paused and frowned. "Pish," he added, "I was talking folly; but what head would not you turn? Resist you I must, for I am on my way now to my drudgery. Ask me anything, some years hence, when I have time to be happy, and then see if I am the bear you now call me."

"Well," said Mrs. Mivers, emphatically, "are you coming, or are you not? Don't stand there, shilly-shally."

"Mrs. Mivers," returned Ardworth, with a kind of sly humour, "I am sure you would be very angry with your husband's excellent shopmen, if that was the way they spoke to your customers. If some unhappy dropper-in—some lady who came to buy a yard or so of Irish, was suddenly dazzled, as I am, by a luxury wholly unforeseen and eagerly coveted—a splendid lace veil, or a ravishing cashmere, or whatever else you ladies desiderate, and while she was balancing between prudence and temptation, your foreman exclaimed—'Don't stand shilly shally,'—come, I put it to you."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Mivers.

"Alas! unlike your imaginary customer—(I hope so, at least, for the sake of your till)—pru-

dence gets the better of me ; unless," added Ardworth, irresolutely, and glancing at Helen—"unless, indeed, you are not sufficiently protected, and——"

"Purtected!" exclaimed Mrs. Mivers, in an indignant tone of astonishment, and agitating the formidable umbrella, "as if I was not enough, with the help of this here domestic commodity, to purtect a dozen such. PurTECTED, indeed!"

"John is right, Mrs. M.; business is business," said Mr. Mivers. "Let us move on—we stop the way, and those idle lads are listening to us, and sniggering."

"Sniggering!" exclaimed the gentle helpmate ; "I should like to see those who presume for to snigger;" and as she spoke she threw a look of defiance around her. Then, having thus satisfied her resentment, she prepared to obey, as no doubt she always did, her lord and master. Suddenly, with a practised movement, she wheeled round Mr. Mivers, and taking care to protrude before him the sharp point of the umbrella, cut her way through the crowd like the scythed car of the ancient Britons, and was soon lost amidst the throng, although her way might be guessed by

a slight ripple of peculiar agitation along the general stream, accompanied by a prolonged murmur of reproach or expostulation which gradually died in the distance.

Ardworth gazed after the fair form of Helen with a look of regret; and, when it vanished,—with a slight start and a suppressed sigh, he turned away, and with the long, steady stride of a strong man, cleared his path through the Strand, towards the printing-office of a journal on which he was responsibly engaged.

But Percival, who had caught much of the conversation that took place so near him—Percival, happy child of idleness and whim, had no motive of labour and occupation to stay the free impulse of his heart, and his heart drew him on, with magnetic attraction, in the track of the first being that had ever touched the sweet instincts of youth.

Meanwhile Mrs. Mivers was destined to learn—though, perhaps, the lesson little availed her—that to get smoothly through this world it is necessary to be supple as well as strong; and though, up to a certain point, man or woman may force the way by poking umbrellas into people's ribs, and treading mercilessly upon people's toes,

yet the endurance of ribs and toes has its appointed limits.

Helen, half terrified, also half amused by her companion's robust resolution of purpose, had in Mrs. Mivers's general courage and success that confidence which the weak repose in the strong, and though, whenever she turned her eyes from the illuminations, she besought Mrs. Mivers to be more gentle, yet, seeing that they had gone safely from St. Paul's to St. James's, she had no distinct apprehension of any practically ill results from the energies she was unable to mitigate. But now, having just gained the end of St. James's Street, Mrs. Mivers at last found her match. The crowd here halted, thick and serried, to gaze in peace upon the brilliant vista which the shops and clubs of that street presented. Coaches and carriages had paused in their line, and immediately before Mrs. Mivers stood three very thin, small women, whose dress bespoke them to be of the humblest class.

"Make way, there—make way, my good women,—make way!" cried Mrs. Mivers, equally disdainful of the size and the rank of the obstructing parties.

“Arrah, and what shall we make way for the like of you, you ould busy body?” said one of the dames, turning round, and presenting a very formidable squint to the broad optics of Mrs. Mivers.

Without deigning a reply, Mrs. Mivers had recourse to her usual tactics. Umbrella and husband went right between two of the feminine obstructives; and to the inconceivable astonishment and horror of the assailant, husband and umbrella instantly vanished. The three small furies had pounced upon both. They were torn from their natural owner—they were hurried away; the stream behind, long fretted at the path so abruptly made amidst it, closed in, joyous with a thousand waves. Mrs. Mivers and Helen were borne forward in one way, the umbrella and the husband in the other: at the distance a small voice was heard—“Don’t you!—don’t! Be quiet! Mrs.—Mrs.—Mrs. M.! Oh! oh! Mrs. M.!” At that last repetition of the beloved and familiar initial, uttered in a tone of almost superhuman anguish, the conjugal heart of Mrs. Mivers was afflicted beyond control.

“Wait here a moment, my dear! I’ll just give

it them—that's all!" And in another moment Mrs. Mivers was heard bustling, scolding, till all trace of her whereabouts was gone from the eyes of Helen. Thus left alone, in exceeding shame and dismay, the poor girl cast a glance around. The glance was caught by two young men, whose station, in these days when dress is an equivocal designator of rank, could not be guessed by their exterior. They might be dandies from the west—they might be clerks from the east.

"By Jove," exclaimed one, "that's a sweet pretty girl!" and, by a sudden movement of the crowd, they both found themselves close to Helen.

"Are you alone, my dear?" said a voice rudely familiar.

Helen made no reply—the tone of the voice frightened her. A gap in the mob showed the space towards Cleveland Row, which, leading to no illuminations, was vacant and solitary. She instantly made towards this spot; the two men followed her,—the bolder and elder one occasionally trying to catch hold of her arm. At last, as she passed the last house to the left, a house then owned by One who, at once far-sighted and impetuous, affable and haughty—characterized

alike by solid virtues and brilliant faults—would, but for hollow friends, have triumphed over countless foes, and enjoyed at last that brief day of stormy power for which statesmen resign the health of manhood and the hope of age—as she passed that memorable mansion, she suddenly perceived that the space before her had no thoroughfare, and, while she paused in dismay, her pursuers blockaded her escape.

One of them now fairly seized her hand: “Nay, pretty one, why so cruel? But one kiss—only one!” He endeavoured to pass his arm round her waist while he spoke. Helen eluded him, and darted forward, to find her way stopped by her persecutor’s companion, when, to her astonishment, a third person gently pushed aside the form that impeded her path, approached, and looking mute defiance at the unchivalric molesters, offered her his arm. Helen gave but one timid hurrying glance to her unexpected protector: Something in his face, his air, his youth, appealed at once to her confidence. Mechanically, and scarce knowing what she did, she laid her trembling hand on the arm held out to her.

The two Lotharios looked foolish. One pulled

up his shirt collar, the other turned, with a forced laugh, on his heel. Boy as Percival seemed, and little more than boy as he was, there was a dangerous fire in his eye, and an expression of spirit and ready courage in his whole countenance, which, if it did not awe his tall rivals, made them at least unwilling to have a scene, and provoke the interference of the policemen, one of whom was now seen walking slowly up to the spot. They, therefore, preserved a discomfited silence; and Percival St. John, with his heart going ten knots a beat, sailed triumphantly off with his prize.

Scarcely knowing whither he went, certainly forgetful of Mr. Mivers, in his anxiety to escape at least from the crowd, Percival walked on till he found himself with his fair charge under the trees of St. James's Park.

Then Helen, recovering herself, paused, and said, alarmed, "But this is not my way—I must go back to the street!"

"How foolish I am—that is true!" said Percival, looking confused. "I—I felt so happy to be with you, feel your hand on my arm, and think that we were all by ourselves, that—that—but you have dropped your flowers!"

And as a bouquet Helen wore, dislodged somehow or other, fell to the ground, both stooped to pick it up, and their hands met. At that touch, Percival felt a strange tremble, which perhaps communicated itself (for such things are contagious) to his fair companion. Percival had got the nosegay, and seemed willing to detain it, for he bent his face lingeringly over the flowers. At length, he turned his bright ingenuous eyes to Helen, and singling one rose from the rest, said beseechingly—"May I keep this? See, it is not so fresh as the others."

"I am sure, sir," said Helen, colouring, and looking down, "I owe you so much that I should be glad if a poor flower could repay it."

"A poor flower! You don't know what a prize this is to me!"

Percival placed the rose reverently in his bosom, and the two moved back slowly, as if reluctant both, through the old palace court into the street.

"Is that lady related to you?" asked Percival, looking another way, and dreading the reply: "Not your mother, surely!"

"Oh, no!—I have no mother!"

“Forgive me!” said Percival, for the tone of Helen’s voice told him that he had touched the spring of a household sorrow. “And,” he added, with a jealousy that he could scarcely restrain from making itself evident in his accent, “that gentleman who spoke to you under the Colonnade,—I have seen him before, but where I cannot remember. In fact, you have put everything but yourself out of my head. Is he related to you?”

“He is my cousin.”

“Cousin!” repeated Percival, pouting a little; and again there was silence.

“I don’t know how it is,” said Percival, at last, and very gravely, as if much perplexed by some abstruse thought, “but I feel as if I had known you all my life. I never felt this for any one before.”

There was something so irresistibly innocent in the boy’s serious, wondering tone, as he said these words, that a smile, in spite of herself, broke out amongst the thousand dimples round Helen’s charming lips. Perhaps the little witch felt a touch of coquetry for the first time.

Percival, who was looking sidelong into her face, saw the smile, and said, drawing up his head, and shaking back his jetty curls, “I dare

say you are laughing at me as a mere boy ; but I am older than I look. I am sure I am much older than you are. Let me see, you are seventeen, I suppose ?”

Helen, getting more and more at her ease, nodded playful assent.

“ And I am not far from twenty-one. Ah ! you may well look surprised—but so it is. An hour ago I felt a mere boy ; now I shall never feel a boy again !”

Once more there was a long pause, and before it was broken they had gained the very spot in which Helen had lost her friend.

“ Why, bless us, and save us !” exclaimed a voice ‘ loud as a trumpet,’ but not ‘ with a silver sound,’ “ there you are, after all ;” and Mrs. Mivers (husband and umbrella both regained) planted herself full before them.

“ Oh, a pretty fright I have been in ; and now to see you coming along as cool as if nothing had happened—as if the humbrella had not lost its hivory andle—it’s quite purvoking. Dear, dear ! what we have gone through ! And who is this young gentleman, pray ?”

Helen whispered some hesitating explanation,

which Mrs. Mivers did not seem to receive as graciously as Percival, poor fellow, had a right to expect. She stared him full in the face, and shook her head suspiciously when she saw him a little confused by the survey. Then, tucking Helen tightly under her arm, she walked back towards the Haymarket, merely saying to Percival—

“Much obliged, and good night. I have a long journey to take to set down this here young lady, and the best thing we can all do is to get home as fast as we can, and have a refreshing cup of tea—that’s my mind, sir. Excuse me!”

Thus abruptly dismissed, poor Percival gazed wistfully on his Helen, as she was borne along, and was somewhat comforted at seeing her look back, with (as he thought) a touch of regret in her parting smile. Then suddenly it flashed across him how sadly he had wasted his time. Novice that he was, he had not even learned the name and address of his new acquaintance. At that thought he hurried on through the crowd, but only reached the object of his pursuit just in time to see her placed in a coach, and to catch a full view of the luxuriant proportions of Mrs. Mivers as she followed her into the vehicle.

As the lumbering conveyance (the only coach on the stand) heaved itself into motion, Percival's eye fell on the sweeper, who was still leaning on his broom, and who, in grateful recognition of the unwonted generosity that had repaid his service, touched his ragged hat, and smiled drowsily on his young customer. Love sharpens the wit, and animates the timid;—a thought, worthy of the most experienced, inspired Percival St. John: he hurried to the sweeper, laid his hand on his patchwork coat, and said, breathlessly—

“ You see that coach turning into the square ; follow it—find out where it sets down. There's a sovereign for you—another if you succeed. Call and tell me your success. Number —— Curzon-street !—off, like a shot !”

The sweeper nodded and grinned ; it was possibly not his first commission of a similar kind. He darted down the street ; and Percival, following him with equal speed, had the satisfaction to see him, as the coach traversed St. James's-square, comfortably seated on the footboard.

He, dull clod, knew nothing, cared nothing, felt nothing as to the motives or purpose of his employer. Honest love or selfish vice, it was the

same to him. He saw only the one sovereign which, with astounded eyes, he still gazed at on his palm, and the vision of the sovereign that was yet to come:

“Scandit æratas vitiosa naves,
Cura: nec turmas equitum relinquit.”

It was the Selfishness of London—calm and stolid, whether on the track of innocence or at the command of guile.

At half-past ten o'clock, Percival St. John was seated in his room, and the sweeper stood at the threshold. Wealth and penury seemed brought into visible contact in the persons of the visitor and the host. The dwelling is held by some to give an index to the character of the owner; if so, Percival's apartments differed much from those generally favoured by young men of rank and fortune. On the one hand it had none of that affectation of superior taste, evinced in marqueterie and gilding, or the more picturesque discomfort of high-backed chairs and mediæval curiosities which prevails in the daintier abodes of fastidious bachelors. Nor, on the other hand, had it the sporting character which individualizes the ruder juveniles. ‘*qui gaudent equis,*’ be-

trayed by engravings of racers, and celebrated fox-hunts, relieved, perhaps, if the Nimrod condescend to a cross of the Lovelace, with portraits of *figurantes*, and ideals of French sentiment, entitled, "*Le Soir*," or "*La Reveillée*," "*L'Espoir*," or "*L'Abandon*." But the rooms had a physiognomy of their own, from their exquisite neatness and cheerful simplicity. The chintz draperies were lively with gay flowers; books filled up the niches; here and there were small pictures, chiefly sea pieces—well chosen, well placed.

There might, indeed, have been something almost effeminate in a certain inexpressible purity of taste, and a cleanliness of detail that seemed actually brilliant, had not the folding-doors allowed a glimpse of a plainer apartment, with fencing foils and boxing-gloves ranged on the wall, and a cricket-bat resting carelessly in the corner. These gave a redeeming air of manliness to the rooms, but it was the manliness of a boy; half girl, if you please, in the purity of thought that pervaded one room, all boy in the playful pursuits that were made manifest in the other. Simple, however, as this abode really was, poor Beck had never been admitted to the sight of anything half

so fine. He stood at the door for a moment, and stared about him, bewildered and dazzled. But his natural torpor to things that concerned him not, soon brought to him the same stoicism that philosophy gives the strong; and after the first surprise, his eye quietly settled on his employer. St. John rose eagerly from the sofa, on which he had been contemplating the starlit tree-tops of Chesterfield Gardens—

“Well, well?” said Percival.

“*Hold Brompton*,” said Beck, with a brevity of word and clearness of perception worthy a Spartan.

“Old Brompton?” repeated Percival, thinking the reply the most natural in the world.

“In a big ous by hisself,” continued Beck, “with a igh vall in front.”

“You would know it again?”

“In course; he’s so wery peculiar.”

“He? who?”

“Vy, the ous. The young lady got out, and the hold folks driv back. I did not go arter *them*!”—and Beck looked sly.

“So;—I must find out the name.”

“I axed at the public,” said Beck, proud of his

diplomacy. "They keeps a sarvant vot takes half a pint at her meals. The young lady's ma be a foriner."

"A foreigner! Then she lives there with her mother?"

"So they 'spose at the public."

"And the name?"

Beck shook his head. "'Tis a French un, your onor; but the sarvant's is Martha."

"You must meet me at Brompton, near the turnpike, to-morrow, and show me the house."

"Vy, I's in bizness all day, please your onor."

"In bizness?"

"I's the place of the crossing," said Beck, with much dignity; "but arter eight I goes where I likes."

"To-morrow evening, then, at half-past eight, by the turnpike."

Beck pulled his forelock assentingly.

"There's the sovereign I promised you, my poor fellow—much good may it do you. Perhaps you have some father or mother whose heart it will glad."

"I never had no such thing," replied Beck, turning the coin in his hand.

"Well, don't spend it in drink."

"I never drinks nothing but svipes."

"Then," said Percival, laughingly, "what, my good friend, will you ever do with your money?"

Beck put his finger to his nose, sunk his voice into a whisper, and replied, solemnly—"I as a mattris."

"A mistress," said Percival; "oh, a sweetheart! Well; but if she's a good girl, and loves you, she won't let you spend your money on her."

"I haint such a ninny as that," said Beck, with majestic contempt. "I 'spises the flat that is done brown by the blowens. I as a mattris."

"A mattress! a mattress! Well, what has that to do with the money?"

"Vy, I lines it."

Percival looked puzzled. "Oh," said he, after a thoughtful pause, and in a tone of considerable compassion, "I understand; you sew your money in your mattress. My poor, poor lad, you can do better than that!—there are the savings banks."

Beck looked frightened: "I opes your 'onor

vont tell no vun. I opes no vun vont go for to put my tin vere I shall know nothing vatsomever about it. Now, I knows vere it is—and I lays on it.”

“Do you sleep more soundly when you lie on your treasure?”

“No; it’s hodd,” said Beck, musingly, “but the more I lines it, the vorse I sleeps.”

Percival laughed; but there was melancholy in his laughter; something in the forlorn, benighted, fatherless, squalid miser, went to the core of his open, generous heart.

“Do you ever read your Bible?” said he, after a pause; “—or even the newspaper?”

“I does not read nothing, cos vy, I haint been made a schollard, like swell Tim, as was lagged for a forgery.”

“You go to church on a Sunday?”

“Yes; I ’as a weekly hingagement at the New Road.”

“What do you mean?”

“To see arter the gig of a gemman vot comes from Ighgate.”

Percival lifted his brilliant eyes, and they were moistened with a heavenly dew, on the dull face

of his fellow-creature. Beck made a scrape, looked round, shambled back to the door, and ran home, through the lamp-lit streets of the great mart of the Christian universe, to sew the gold in his mattress.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY TRAINING FOR AN UPRIGHT GENTLEMAN.

PERCIVAL ST. JOHN had been brought up at home under the eye of his mother and the care of an excellent man, who had been tutor to himself and his brothers. The tutor was not much of a classical scholar, for, in great measure, he had educated himself; and he who does so, usually lacks the polish and brilliancy of one whose footsteps have been led early to the Temple of the Muses. In fact, Captain Greville was a gallant soldier, with whom Vernon St. John had been acquainted in his own brief military career, and whom circumstances had so reduced in life as to compel him to sell his commission, and live as he could. He had always been known in his regiment as a reading man, and his authority looked up to in

all the disputes as to history and dates, and literary anecdotes, which might occur at the mess-table. Vernon considered him the most learned man of his acquaintance; and, when accidentally meeting him in London, he learned his fallen fortunes, he congratulated himself on a very brilliant idea, when he suggested that Captain Greville should assist him in the education of his boys and the management of his estate. At first, all that Greville modestly undertook, with respect to the former, and, indeed, was expected to do, was to prepare the young gentlemen for Eton, to which Vernon, with the natural predilection of an Eton man, destined his sons. But the sickly constitutions of the two elder justified Lady Mary in her opposition to a public school; and Percival conceived early so strong an affection for a sailor's life, that the father's intentions were frustrated. The two elder continued their education at home; and Percival, at an earlier age than usual, went to sea. The last was fortunate enough to have for his captain one of that new race of naval officers who, well educated and accomplished, form a notable contrast to the old heroes of Smollet. Percival, however, had not been long in the service before

the deaths of his two elder brothers, preceded by that of his father, made him the head of his ancient house, and the sole prop of his mother's earthly hopes. He conquered with a generous effort the passion for his noble profession, which service had but confirmed, and returned home with his fresh child-like nature uncorrupted, his constitution strengthened, his lively and impressionable mind braced by the experience of danger and the habits of duty, and quietly resumed his reading under Captain Greville, who had moved from the hall to a small house in the village.

Now, the education he had received, from first to last, was less adapted prematurely to quicken his intellect and excite his imagination than to warm his heart and elevate, while it chastened, his moral qualities; for in Lady Mary there was, amidst singular sweetness of temper, a high cast of character and thought. She was not what is commonly called clever, and her experience of the world was limited, compared to that of most women of similar rank who pass their lives in the vast theatre of London. But she became superior by a certain single-heartedness which made truth so habitual to her, that the light in which she lived

rendered all objects around her clear. One who is always true, in the great duties of life is nearly always wise. And Vernon, when he had fairly buried his faults, had felt a noble shame for the excesses into which they had led him. Gradually more and more wedded to his home, he dropped his old companions. He set grave guard on his talk, (his *habits* now required no guard,) lest any of the ancient levity should taint the ears of his children. Nothing is more common in parents than their desire that their children should escape their faults. We scarcely know ourselves till we have children, and then, if we love them duly, we look narrowly into failings that become vices, when they serve as examples to the young.

The inborn gentleman, with the native courage, and spirit, and horror of trick and falsehood which belong to that chivalrous abstraction, survived almost alone in Vernon St. John; and his boys sprang up in the atmosphere of generous sentiments and transparent truth. The tutor was in harmony with the parents—a soldier every inch of him—not a mere disciplinarian, yet with a profound sense of duty, and a knowledge that duty is to be found in attention to details. In incul-

cating the habit of subordination so graceful to the young, he knew how to make himself beloved, and, what is harder still, to be understood. The soul of this poor soldier was white and unstained, as the arms of a maiden knight; it was full of suppressed, but lofty enthusiasm. He had been ill-used, whether by Fate or the Horse Guards—his career had been a failure, but he was as loyal as if his hand held the field-marshal's truncheon and the garter bound his knee. He was above all querulous discontent. From him, no less than from his parents, Percival caught not only a spirit of honour worthy the *antiqua fides* of the poets, but that peculiar cleanliness of thought, if the expression may be used, which belongs to the ideal of youthful chivalry. In mere book-learning, Percival, as may be supposed, was not very extensively read; but his mind, if not largely stored, had a certain unity of culture which gave it stability and individualized its operations. Travels, voyages, narratives of heroic adventure, biographies of great men, had made the favourite pasture of his enthusiasm. To this was added the more stirring, and, perhaps, the more genuine order of poets who make you feel and glow, rather

than doubt and ponder. He knew, at least, enough of Greek to enjoy old Homer; and if he could have come but ill through a college examination into Æschylus and Sophocles, he had dwelt with fresh delight on the rushing storm of spears, in the *Seven before Thebes*, and wept over the heroic calamities of *Antigone*. In science, he was no adept; but his clear, good sense, and quick appreciation of positive truths, had led him easily through the elementary mathematics, and his somewhat martial spirit had made him delight in the old captain's lectures on military tactics. Had he remained in the navy, Percival St. John would, doubtless, have been distinguished. His talents fitted him for straightforward manly action; and he had a generous desire of distinction, vague, perhaps, the moment he was taken from his profession, and curbed by his diffidence in himself and his sense of deficiencies in the ordinary routine of purely classical education. Still he had in him all the elements of a true man—a man to go through life with a firm step and a clear conscience, and a gallant hope. Such a man may not win fame, *that* is an accident; but he must occupy no despicable place in the movement of the world.

It was at first intended to send Percival to Oxford, but for some reason or other, that design was abandoned. Perhaps Lady Mary, over-cautious, as mothers left alone sometimes are,—feared the contagion to which a young man of brilliant expectations, and no studious turn, is necessarily exposed in all places of miscellaneous resort.—So Percival was sent abroad for two years, under the guardianship of Captain Greville. On his return, at the age of nineteen—the great world lay before him, and he longed ardently to enter. For a year Lady Mary's fears and fond anxieties detained him at Laughton; but, though his great tenderness for his mother withheld Percival from opposing her wishes by his own, this interval of inaction affected visibly his health and spirits. Captain Greville, a man of the world, saw the cause sooner than Lady Mary, and one morning, earlier than usual, he walked up to the Hall.

The captain, with all his deference to the sex, was a plain man enough, when business was to be done. Like his great commander, he came to the point in a few words.

“My dear Lady Mary, our boy must go to London—we are killing him here.”

"Mr. Greville!" cried Lady Mary, turning pale and putting aside her embroidery—"killing him?"

"Killing the man in him. I don't mean to alarm you—I dare say his lungs are sound enough, and that his heart would bear the sthenoscope to the satisfaction of the College of Surgeons. But, my dear ma'am, Percival is to be a man—it is the man you are killing by keeping him tied to your apron-string."

"Oh, Mr. Greville! I am sure you don't wish to wound me, but——"

"I beg ten thousand pardons. I am rough, but truth is rough sometimes."

"It is not for my sake," said the mother, warmly, and with tears in her eyes, "that I have wished him to be here. If he is dull, can we not fill the house for him?"

"Fill a thimble, my dear lady Mary—Percival should have a plunge in the ocean."

"But he is so young yet, that horrid London!—such temptations—fatherless, too!"

"I have no fear of the result if Percival goes now while his principles are strong, and his imagination not inflamed; but if we keep him here much longer against his bent, he will learn

to brood and to muse, write bad poetry perhaps, and think the world withheld from him a thousand times more delightful than it is. This very dread of temptation will provoke his curiosity, irritate his fancy, make him imagine the temptation must be a very delightful thing. For the first time in my life, ma'am, I have caught him sighing over fashionable novels, and subscribing to the Southampton Circulating Library. Take my word for it, it is time that Percival should begin life, and swim without corks."

Lady Mary had a profound confidence in Greville's judgment and affection for Percival, and like a sensible woman she was aware of her own weakness. She remained silent for a few moments, and then said, with an effort—

"You know how hateful London is to me now—how unfit I am to return to the hollow forms of its society; still, if you think it right, I will take a house for the season, and Percival can still be under our eye."

"No, ma'am, pardon me, that will be the surest way to make him either discontented or hypocritical. A young man of his prospects and temper can hardly be expected to chime in with all our

sober, old-fashioned habits. You will impose on him—if he is to conform to our hours, and notions, and quiet set—a thousand irksome restraints; and what will be the consequence? In a year, he will be of age, and can throw us off altogether, if he pleases. I know the boy:—don't seem to distrust him—he may be trusted. You place the true constraint on temptation, when you say to him, 'We confide to you our dearest treasure—your honour, your morals, your conscience, yourself!'

"But, at least, you will go with him, if it must be so," said Lady Mary, after a few timid arguments, from which, one by one, she was driven.

"I!—what for?—to be a jest of the young puppies he must know—to make him ashamed of himself and me—himself as a milksop, and me as a dry nurse."

"But this was not so abroad!"

"Abroad, ma'am, I gave him full swing, I promise you; and when we went abroad, he was two years younger."

"But he is a mere child, still."

"Child, Lady Mary! At his age, I had gone through two sieges. There are younger faces than his at a mess-room. Come, come! I know

what you fear—he may commit some follies; very likely. He may be taken in, and lose some money—he can afford it, and he will get experience in return. Vices he has none. I have seen him—ay, with the vicious. Send him out against the world, like a saint of old, with his Bible in his hand, and no spot on his robe. Let him see fairly what is, not stay here to dream of what is not. And when he's of age, ma'am, we must get him an object—a pursuit;—start him for the county, and make him serve the state; he will understand that business pretty well. Tush! tush! what is there to cry at?"

The Captain prevailed. We don't say that his advice would have been equally judicious for all youths of Percival's age; but he knew well the nature to which he confided; he knew well how strong was that young heart in its healthful simplicity and instinctive rectitude; and he appreciated its manliness not too highly when he felt that all evident props and aids would be but irritating tokens of distrust.

And thus, armed only with letters of introduction, his mother's tearful admonitions, and Greville's experienced warnings, Percival St. John

was launched into London life. After the first month or so, Greville came up to visit him, do him sundry kind invisible offices amongst his old friends, help him to equip his apartments, and mount his stud; and, wholly satisfied with the results of his experiment, returned in high spirits with flattering reports to the anxious mother.

But, indeed, the tone of Percival's letters would have been sufficient to allay even maternal anxiety. He did not write, as sons are too apt to do, short excuses for not writing more at length, unsatisfactory compressions of details, (exciting worlds of conjecture,) into a hurried sentence. Frank and overflowing, those delightful epistles gave accounts fresh from the first impressions of all he saw and did. There was a racy, wholesome gusto in his enjoyment of novelty and independence. His balls and his dinners, and his cricket at *Lord's*—his partners, and his companions; his general gaiety, his occasional *ennui*, furnished ample materials to one who felt he was corresponding with another heart, and had nothing to fear or to conceal.

But about two months before this portion of our narrative opens with the coronation, Lady

Mary's favourite sister, who had never married, and who, by the death of her parents, was left alone in the worse than widowhood of an old maid, had been ordered to Pisa, for a complaint that betrayed pulmonary symptoms ; and Lady Mary, with her usual unselfishness, conquered both her aversion to movement and her wish to be in reach of her son, to accompany abroad this beloved and solitary relative. Captain Greville was pressed into service as their joint cavalier. And thus Percival's habitual intercourse with his two principal correspondents received a temporary check.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN ARDWORTH.

AT noon the next day, Beck, restored to his grandeur, was at the helm of his state; Percival was vainly trying to be amused by the talk of two or three loungers who did him the honour to smoke a cigar in his rooms; and John Ardworth sat in his dingy cell in Gray's Inn, with a pile of law books on the table, and the daily newspapers carpeting a footstool of *Hansard's Debates* upon the floor—no unusual combination of studies amongst the poorer and more ardent students of the law, who often owe their earliest, nor perhaps their least noble earnings, to employment in the empire of the Press. By the power of a mind habituated to labour, and backed by a frame of remarkable strength and endurance, Ardworth

grappled with his arid studies not the less manfully for a night mainly spent in a printer's office, and stinted to less than four hours' actual sleep. But that sleep was profound and refreshing as a peasant's. The nights thus devoted to the Press, (he was employed in the sub-editing of a daily journal,) the mornings to the law, he kept distinct the two separate callings with a stern subdivision of labour, which in itself proved the vigour of his energy and the resolution of his will. Early compelled to shift for himself, and carve out his own way, he had obtained a small fellowship at the small college in which he had passed his academic career. Previous to his arrival in London, by contributions to political periodicals, and a high reputation at that noble debating society in Cambridge which has trained some of the most eminent of living public men,* he had established a name which was immediately useful

* Amongst those whom the "Union" almost contemporaneously prepared for public life, and whose distinction has kept the promise of their youth, we may mention the eminent barristers, Messrs. Austin and Cockburn; and amongst statesmen, Lord Grey, Mr. C. Buller, Mr. Charles Villiers, and Mr. Macanley. Nor ought we to forget those brilliant competitors for the prizes of the University, Dr. Kennedy (now head-master of Shrewsbury School) and the late Winthrop M. Praed.

to him in obtaining employment on the Press. Like most young men of practical ability, he was an eager politician. The popular passion of the day kindled his enthusiasm, and stirred the depths of his soul with magnificent, though exaggerated, hopes in the destiny of his race. He identified himself with the people ; his stout heart beat loud in their stormy cause. His compositions, if they wanted that knowledge of men, that subtle comprehension of the true state of parties, that happy *temperance* in which the crowning wisdom of statesmen must consist—qualities which experience alone can give—excited considerable attention by their bold eloquence and hardy logic. They were suited to the time. But John Ardworth had that solidity of understanding which betokens more than talent,—which is the usual sub-stratum of genius. He would not depend alone on the precarious and often unhonoured toils of polemical literature for that distinction on which he had fixed his steadfast heart. Patiently he plodded on through the formal drudgeries of his new profession, lighting up dulness by his own acute comprehension, weaving complexities into simple system by the grasp of an intellect inured to generalize ; and learning to love even

what was most distasteful, by the sense of difficulty overcome, and the clearer vision which every step through the mists, and up the hill, gave of the land beyond. Of what the superficial are apt to consider genius, John Ardworth had but little. He had some imagination, (for a true thinker is never without that,) but he had a very slight share of fancy. He did not flirt with the Muses; on the granite of his mind, few flowers could spring. His style, rushing and earnest, admitted at times of a humour not without delicacy—though less delicate than forcible and deep—but it was little adorned with wit, and still less with poetry. Yet Ardworth had genius, and genius ample and magnificent. There was genius in that industrious energy so patient in the conquest of detail, so triumphant in the perception of results. There was genius in that kindly sympathy with mankind—genius in that stubborn determination to succeed—genius in that vivid comprehension of affairs, and the large interests of the world—genius fed in the labours of the closet, and evinced the instant he was brought in contact with men; evinced in readiness of thought, grasp of memory, even in a rough imperious manner, which showed him

born to speak strong truths, and in their name to struggle and command.

Rough was this man often in his exterior, though really gentle and kind-hearted. John Ardworth had sacrificed to no Graces ; he would have thrown Lord Chesterfield into a fever. Not that he was ever vulgar, for vulgarity implies affectation of refinement, but he talked loud, and laughed loud if the whim seized him, and rubbed his great hands with a boyish heartiness of glee, if he discomfited an adversary in argument. Or sometimes he would sit abstracted and moody, and answer briefly and boorishly those who interrupted him. Young men were mostly afraid of him, though he wanted but fame to have a set of admiring disciples.' Old men censured his presumption, and recoiled from the novelty of his ideas. Women alone liked and appreciated him, as, with their finer insight into character, they generally do, what is honest and sterling. Some strange failings, too, had John Ardworth—some of the usual vagaries and contradictions of clever men. As a system, he was rigidly abstemious. For days together he would drink nothing but water, eat nothing but bread, or hard biscuit, or a couple of

eggs: then having wound up some allotted portion of work, Ardworth would indulge what he called a self-saturnalia—would stride off with old college friends to an inn in one of the suburbs, and spend, as he said triumphantly, ‘a day of blessed debauch!’ Innocent enough, for the most part, the debauch was;—consisting in cracking jests, stringing puns, a fish dinner, perhaps, and an extra bottle or two of fiery port. Sometimes this jollity, which was always loud and uproarious, found its scene in one of the cider cellars or midnight taverns, but Ardworth’s labours on the Press made that latter dissipation extremely rare. These relaxations were always succeeded by a mien more than usually grave, a manner more than usually curt and ungracious, an application more than ever rigorous and intense. John Ardworth was not a good-tempered man, but he was the best-natured man that ever breathed. He was like all ambitious persons, very much occupied with self, and yet it would have been a ludicrous misapplication of words to call him selfish. Even the desire of fame which absorbed him was but a part of benevolence—a desire to promote justice and to serve his kind.

John Ardworth’s shaggy brows were bent over his open volumes, when his clerk entered noise-

lessly, and placed on his table a letter which the twopenny postman had just delivered. With an impatient shrug of the shoulders, Ardworth glanced towards the superscription, but his eye became earnest and his interest aroused, as he recognised the hand. "Again!" he muttered, "what mystery is this? Who can feel such interest in my fate?" He broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"Do you neglect my advice, or have you begun to act upon it? Are you contented only with the slow process of mechanical application, or will you make a triumphant effort to abridge your apprenticeship, and emerge at once into fame and power? I repeat that you fritter away your talents and your opportunities upon this miserable task-work on a journal. I am impatient for you. Come forward yourself, put your force and your knowledge into some work of which the world may know the author. Day after day, I am examining into your destiny, and day after day I believe more and more that you are not fated for the tedious drudgery to which you doom your youth. I would have you great, but in the senate, not a wretched casuist at the bar. Appear in public as an individual authority, not one of that

nameless troop of shadows, contemned while dreaded as, the Press. Write for renown. Go into the world, and make friends. Soften your rugged bearing. Lift yourself above that herd whom you call *the people*. What if you are born of the noble class? What if your career is as gentleman not Plebeian? Want not for money. Use what I send you, as the young and the well-born should use it; or let it, at least, gain you a respite from toils for bread—and support you in your struggle to emancipate yourself from obscurity into fame.

“YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND.”

A bank-note for £100 dropped from the envelope, as Ardworth silently replaced the letter on the table.

Thrice before had he received communications in the same handwriting, and much to the same effect. Certainly, to a mind of less strength, there would have been something very unsettling in those vague hints of a station higher than he owned—of a future at variance with the toilsome lot he had drawn from the urn; but after a single glance over his lone position in all its bearings, and probable expectations, Ard-

worth's steady sense shook off the slight disturbance such misty vaticinations had effected. His mother's family was indeed unknown to him—he was even ignorant of her maiden name. But that very obscurity seemed unfavourable to much hope from such a quarter. The connexions with the rich and well-born are seldom left obscure. From his father's family he had not one expectation. More had he been moved by exhortations now generally repeated, but in a previous letter more precisely detailed—*viz.*, to appeal to the reading public in his acknowledged person, and by some striking and original work. This idea he had often contemplated and revolved, unprompted; but partly the necessity of keeping pace with the many exigencies of the hour, had deterred him, and partly also the conviction of his sober judgment, that a man does himself no good at the bar, even by the most brilliant distinction gained in discursive fields. He had the natural yearning of the Restless Genius; and the Patient Genius (higher power of the two) had suppressed the longing. Still so far, the whispers of his correspondent tempted and aroused. But hitherto he had sought to persuade himself that the communications thus strangely forced on him, arose, perhaps, from idle

motives—a jest, it might be, of one of his old college friends, or at best the vain enthusiasm of some more credulous admirer. But the enclosure now sent to him, forbade either of these suppositions. Who that he knew could afford so costly a jest, or so extravagant a tribute? He was perplexed, and with his perplexity was mixed a kind of fear. Plain, earnest, unromantic, in the common acceptation of the word, the mystery of this intermeddling with his fate, this arrogation of the licence to spy, the right to counsel, and the privilege to bestow, gave him the uneasiness the bravest men may feel at noises in the dark. That day he could apply no more—he could not settle back to his Law Reports. He took two or three unquiet turns up and down his smoke-dried cell, then locked up the letter and enclosure, seized his hat, and strode, with his usual lusty swinging strides, into the open air.

But still the letter haunted him. “And if,” he said, almost audibly, “if I were the heir to some higher station, why then I might have a heart like idle men; and Helen—beloved Helen!”—he paused, sighed, shook his rough head, shaggy with neglected curls, and added—“As if even

then I could steal myself into a girl's good graces! Man's esteem I may command, though poor—woman's love could I win, though rich! Pooh! pooh! every wood does not make a Mercury; and faith, the wood I am made of, will scarcely cut up into a lover."

Nevertheless, though thus soliloquizing, Ardworth mechanically bent his way towards Brompton, and halted, half ashamed of himself, at the house where Helen lodged with her aunt. It was a building that stood apart from all the cottages and villas of that charming suburb, half way down a narrow lane, and enclosed by high melancholy walls, deep set in which a small door, with the paint blistered and weather-stained, gave unfrequented entrance to the demesne. A woman servant of middle age, and starched puritanical appearance, answered the loud ring of the bell, and Ardworth seemed a privileged visitor, for she asked him no question, as with a slight nod, and a smileless stupid expression in a face otherwise comely, she led the way across a paved path, much weed-grown, to the house. That house itself had somewhat of a stern and sad exterior. It was not ancient, yet it looked old from shabbiness and neglect. The vine, loosened

from the rusty nails, trailed rankly against the wall, and fell in crawling branches over the ground. The house had once been white-washed, but the colour, worn off in great patches, distained with damp, struggled here and there with the dingy chipped bricks beneath. There was no peculiar want of what is called 'tenantable repair;' the windows were whole, and doubtless the roof sheltered from the rain. But the wood-work that encased the panes was decayed, and house-leek covered the tiles. Altogether there was that forlorn and cheerless aspect about the place, which chills the visitor, he defines not why. And Ardworth steadied his usual careless step, and crept, as if timidly, up the creaking stairs.

On entering the drawing-room—it seemed at first deserted; but the eye searching round, perceived something stir in the recess of a huge chair—set by the fireless hearth. And from amidst a mass of coverings a pale face emerged, and a thin hand waved its welcome to the visitor.

Ardworth approached, pressed the hand, and drew a seat near to the sufferer's.

"You are better, I hope?" he said cordially,—and yet in a tone of more respect than was often perceptible in his deep blunt voice.

"I am always the same," was the quiet answer ;
"come nearer still. Your visits cheer me."

And as these last words were said, Madame Dalibard raised herself from her recumbent posture, and gazed long upon Ardworth's face of power and front of thought. "You over-fatigue yourself, my poor kinsman," she said, with a certain tenderness :
"you look already too old for your young years."

"That's no disadvantage at the bar."

"Is the bar your means, or your end?"

"My dear Madame Dalibard, it is my profession."

"No, your profession is to rise. John Ardworth," and the low voice swelled in its volume, "You are bold, able, and aspiring—for this, I love you—love you almost—almost as a mother. Your fate," she continued, hurriedly, "interests me ; your energies inspire me with admiration. Often I sit here for hours, musing over your destiny to be—so that at times, I may almost say that in your life I live."

Ardworth looked embarrassed, and with an awkward attempt at compliment, he began hesitatingly : "I should think too highly of myself, if I could really believe that you——"

“Tell me,” interrupted Madame Dalibard: “we have had many conversations upon grave and subtle matters; we have disputed on the secret mysteries of the human mind; we have compared our several experiences of outward life and the mechanism of the social world,—tell me then, and frankly, what do you think of me? Do you regard me merely as your sex is apt to regard the woman, who aspires to equal men—a thing of borrowed phrases and unsound ideas—feeble to guide and unskilled to teach? or do you recognise in this miserable body a mind of force not unworthy yours, ruled by an experience larger than your own?”

“I think of you,” answered Ardworth, frankly, “as the most remarkable woman I have ever met. Yet, do not be angry, I do not like to yield to the influence which you gain over me when we meet. It disturbs my convictions—it disquiets my reason—I do not settle back to my life so easily after your breath has passed over it.”

“And yet,” said Lucretia, with a solemn sadness in her voice, “that influence is but the natural power which cold maturity exercises on ardent youth. It is my mournful advantage over

you, that disquiets your happy calm. It is my experience that unsettles the fallacies which you name 'convictions.' Let this pass. I asked your opinion of me, because I wished to place at your service all that knowledge of life which I possess. In proportion as you esteem me, you will accept or reject my counsels."

"I have benefited by them already. It is the tone that you advised me to assume, that gave me an importance I had not before, with that old formalist whose paper I serve, and whose prejudices I shock; it is to your criticisms that I owe the more practical turn of my writings, and the greater hold they have taken on the public."

"Trifles indeed, these," said Madame Dalibard, with a half smile. "Let them at least induce you to listen to me; if I propose to make your path more pleasant, yet your ascent more rapid."

Ardworth knit his brows, and his countenance assumed an expression of doubt and curiosity. However, he only replied, with a blunt laugh—

"You must be wise, indeed, if you have discovered a royal road to distinction!

"Ah, who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar!"

A more sensible exclamation than poets usually preface with their whining ‘Ah’s’ and ‘Oh’s!’”

“What we *are* is nothing,” pursued Madame Dalibard; “what we *seem* is much.”

Ardworth thrust his hands into his pockets, and shook his head. The wise woman continued, unheeding his dissent from her premises.

“Everything you are taught to value has a likeness, and it is that likeness which the world values. Take a man out of the streets, poor and ragged, what will the world do with him? Send him to the workhouse, if not to the jail. Ask a great painter to take that man’s portrait, rags, squalor, and all; and kings will bid for the picture. You would thrust the man from your doors, you would place the portrait in your palaces. It is the same with qualities, the portrait is worth more than the truth. What is virtue without character? But a man without virtue may thrive on a character! What is genius without success? But how often you bow to success without genius! John Ardworth, possess yourself of the portraits—win the character—seize the success.”

“Madam,” exclaimed Ardworth, rudely, “this is horrible!”

"Horrible it may be," said Madame Dalibard, gently, and feeling, perhaps, that she had gone too far: "but it is the world's judgment. *Seem*, then, as well as *be*. You have virtue, as I believe. Well, wrap yourself in it—in your closet. Go into the world, and earn character. If you have genius, let it comfort you. Rush into the crowd, and get success."

"Stop!" cried Ardworth; "I recognise you. How could I be so blind? It is you who have written to me, and in the same strain; you have robbed yourself—you, poor sufferer, to throw extravagance into these strong hands. And why? What am I to you?"

An expression of actual fondness softened Lucretia's face, as she looked up at him, and replied: "I will tell you hereafter what you are to me. First, I confess that it is I whose letters have perplexed, perhaps offended you. The sum that I sent, I do not miss. I have more—will ever have more at your command—never fear. Yes, I wish you to go into the world, not as a dependant, but as an equal to the world's favourites. I wish you to know more of men than mere law-books teach you. I wish you to be in men's

mouths, create a circle that shall talk of young Ardworth—that talk would travel to those who can advance your career. The very possession of money in certain stages of life gives assurance to the manner, gives attraction to the address.”

“ But,” said Ardworth, “ all this is very well for some favourite of birth and fortune; but for me—yet speak, and plainly, you throw out hints that I am what I know not; but something less dependent on his nerves and his brain, than is plain John Ardworth. What is it you mean?”

Madame Dalibard bent her face over her breast, and rocking herself in her chair, seemed to muse for some moments before she answered.

“ When I first came to England, some months ago, I desired naturally to learn all the particulars of my family and kindred, from which my long residence abroad had estranged me. John Walter Ardworth was related to my half-sister, to me he was but a mere connexion. However, I knew something of his history, yet I did not know that he *had* a son. Shortly before I came to England, I learned that one who *passed* for his son had been brought up by Mr. Fielden, and from Mr. Fielden I have since learned all the

grounds for that belief, from which you take the name of Ardworth."

Lucretia paused a moment; and after a glance at the impatient, wondering, and eager countenance that bent intent upon her, she resumed:

"Your reputed father was, you are doubtless aware, of reckless and extravagant habits. He had been put into the army by my uncle, and he entered that profession with the careless buoyancy of his sanguine nature. I remember those days—that day! Well, to return—where was I?—Walter Ardworth had the folly to entertain strong notions of politics. He dreamt of being a soldier, and yet persuaded himself to be a republican. His notions, so hateful in his profession, got wind; he disguised nothing; he neglected the portraits of things—*Appearances*. He excited the rancour of his commanding officer—for politics then, more even than now, were implacable ministrants to hate—occasion presented itself: during the short peace of Amiens he had been recalled. He had to head a detachment of soldiers against some mob, in Ireland, I believe: he did not fire on the mob according to orders—so, at least, it was said: John Walter Ardworth was

tried by a court-martial, and broke! But you know all this, perhaps?"

"My poor father! Only in part: I knew that he had been dismissed the army—I believed unjustly. He was a soldier, and yet he dared to think for himself, and be humane!"

"But my uncle had left him a legacy—it brought no blessing—none of that old man's gold did. Where are they all now? Dalibard, Susan, and her fair-faced husband, Where? Vernon is in his grave—but one son of many left! Gabriel Varney lives, it is true!—and I! But that gold—yea, in our hands, there was a curse on it! Walter Ardworth had his legacy—his nature was gay: if disgraced in his profession, he found men to pity and praise him—Fools of Party like himself. He lived joyously—drank or gamed, or lent or borrowed—what matters the wherefore?—he was in debt—he lived at last a wretched, shifting, fugitive life—snatching bread where he could—with the bailiffs at his heels—then, for a short time, we met again."

Lucretia's brow grew black as night, as her voice dropped at that last sentence, and it was with a start that she continued.

“ In the midst of this hunted existence, Walter Ardworth appeared, late one night, at Mr. Fielden’s with an infant. He seemed, so says Mr. Fielden, ill, worn, and haggard. He entered into no explanations with respect to the child that accompanied him, and retired at once to rest. What follows, Mr. Fielden, at my request, has noted down. Read, and see what claim you have to the honourable parentage so vaguely ascribed to you.”

As she spoke, Madame Dalibard opened a box on her table, drew forth a paper in Fielden’s writing, and placed it in Ardworth’s hand. After some preliminary statement of the writer’s intimacy with the elder Ardworth, and the appearance of the latter at his house, as related by Madame Dalibard, &c., the document went on thus :—

“ The next day, when my poor guest was still in bed, my servant Hannah came to advise me that two persons were without, waiting to see me. As is my wont, I bade them be shown in. On their entrance, (two rough farmer-looking men they were, whom I thought might be coming to hire my little pasture field,) I prayed them to

speaking low, as a sick gentleman was just over head. Whereupon, and without saying a word farther, the two strangers made a rush from the room, leaving me dumb with amazement; in a few moments, I heard voices and a scuffle above. I recovered myself, and thinking robbers had entered my peaceful house, I called out lustily, when Hannah came in, and we both, taking courage, went up stairs, and found that poor Walter was in the hand of these supposed robbers, who in truth were but bailiffs. They would not trust him out of their sight for a moment. However, he took it more pleasantly than I could have supposed possible; prayed me in a whisper, to take care of the child, and I should soon hear from him again. In less than an hour, he was gone. Two days afterwards, I received from him a hurried letter, without address, of which this is the copy:—

“ ‘DEAR FRIEND,—I slipt from the bailiffs, and here I am in a safe little tavern in sight of the sea! Mother Country is a very bad parent to me; Mother Brownrigg herself could scarcely be worse. I shall work out my passage to some foreign land, and if I can recover my health (sea-

air is bracing!) I don't despair of getting my bread honestly, somehow. If ever I can pay my debts I may return. But, meanwhile, my good old tutor, what will you think of me? You to whom my sole return for so much pains taken in vain, is another mouth to feed! And no money to pay for the board! Yet you won't grudge the child a place at your table, will you? No, nor kind, saving Mrs. Fielden either—God bless her tender, economical soul! You know quite enough of me to be sure that I shall very soon either free you of the boy, or send you something, to prevent its being an incumbrance. I would say, love and pity the child for *my* sake. But I own I feel——By Jove, I must be off—I hear the first signal from the vessel, that——Yours, in haste,

“ ‘J. W. A.’ ”

Young Ardworth stopped from the lecture, and sighed heavily. There seemed to him, in this letter, worse than a mock gaiety;—a certain levity and recklessness—which jarred on his own high principles. And the want of affection for the child thus abandoned was evident—not one fond word. He resumed the statement with a gloomy and disheartened attention.

“This was all I heard from poor erring Walter for more than three years, but I knew, in spite of his follies, that his heart was sound at bottom,” (the son’s eye brightened here, and he kissed the paper,) “and the child was no burthen to us—we loved it, not only for Ardworth’s sake, but for its own, and for charity’s, and Christ’s. Ardworth’s second letter was as follows:—

“ ‘*En iterum Crispinus!*—I am still alive, and getting on in the world—ay, and honestly too—I am no longer spending heedlessly; I am saving for my debts, and I shall live, I trust, to pay off every farthing. First, for my debt to you—I send an order not signed in my name, but equally valid, on Messrs. Drummond, for £250. Repay yourself what the boy has cost. Let him be educated to get his own living—if clever, as a scholar or a lawyer—if dull, as a tradesman. Whatever I may gain, he will have his own way to make. I ought to tell you the story connected with his birth, but it is one of pain and shame; and on reflection, I feel that I have no right to injure him by affixing to his early birth an opprobrium of which he himself is guiltless. If ever I return to England, you

shall know all, and by your counsels I will abide.
Love to all your happy family.

“ ‘ Your grateful Friend and Pupil.’

“ From this letter I began to suspect that the poor boy was probably not born in wedlock, and that Ardworth’s silence arose from his compunction. I conceived it best never to mention this suspicion to John himself as he grew up. Why should I afflict him by a doubt from which his father shrunk, and which might only exist in my own inexperienced and uncharitable interpretation of some vague words? When John was fourteen, I received from Messrs. Drummond a further sum of £500, but without any line from Ardworth, and only to the effect that Messrs. Drummond were directed by a correspondent in Calcutta to pay me the said sum on behalf of expenses incurred for the maintenance of the child left to my charge by John Walter Ardworth. My young pupil had been two years at the university, when I received the letter of which this is a copy:—

“ ‘ How are you?—still well—still happy?—let me hope so! I have not written to you, dear old friend, but I have not been forgetful of you—I

have inquired of you through my correspondents, and have learned, from time to time, such accounts as satisfied my grateful affection for you. I find that you have given the boy my name? Well, let him bear it—it is nothing to boast of, such as it became in my person; but, mind, I do not, therefore, acknowledge him as *my* son. I wish him to think himself without parents, without other aid in the career of life than his own industry and talent,—if talent he has. Let him go through the healthful probation of toil—let him search for and find independence. Till he is of age, £150 will be paid quarterly to your account for him at Messrs. Drummonds'. If then, to set him up in any business or profession, a sum of money be necessary, name the amount by a line, signed A. B., Calcutta, to the care of Messrs. Drummond, and it will reach, and find me disposed to follow your instructions. But after that time all further supply from me will cease. Do not suppose, because I send this from India, that I am laden with rupees; all I can hope to attain is a competence. That boy is not the only one who has claims to share it. Even, therefore, if I had the wish to rear him to the extravagant habits

that ruined myself, I have not the power. Yes!—let him lean on his own strength. In the letter you send me, write fully of your family, your sons, and write as to a man who can perhaps help them in the world, and will be too happy thus in some slight degree to repay all he owes you. You would smile approvingly if you saw me now—a steady, money-getting man, but still yours as ever.

“ ‘P.S.—Do not let the boy write to me, nor give him this clue to my address.’

“ On the receipt of this letter, I wrote fully to Ardworth about the excellent promise and conduct of his poor neglected son. I told him truly he was a son any father might be proud of, and rebuked, even to harshness, Walter’s unseemly tone respecting him. One’s child is one’s child, however the father may have wronged the mother. To this letter I never received any answer. When John was of age, and had made himself independent of want, by obtaining a college fellowship, I spoke to him about his prospects. I told him that his father, though residing abroad and for some reasons keeping himself concealed, had munificently paid hitherto for his

maintenance, and would lay down what might be necessary to start him in business, or perhaps place him in the army; but that his father might be better pleased if he could shew a love of independence, and henceforth maintain himself. I knew the boy I spoke to—John thought as I did, and I never applied for another donation to the elder Ardworth. The allowance ceased: John since then has maintained himself. I have heard no more from his father, though I have written often to the address he gave me. I begin to fear that he is dead. I once went up to town and saw one of the heads of Messrs. Drummonds' firm—a very polite gentleman, but he could give me no information, except that he obeyed instructions from a correspondent at Calcutta—one Mr. Macfarren—whereon I wrote to Mr. Macfarren, and asked him, as I thought very pressingly, to tell me all he knew of poor Ardworth the elder. He answered shortly, that he knew of no such person at all, and that A. B. was a French merchant, settled in Calcutta, who had been dead for above two years. I now gave up all hopes of any further intelligence, and was more convinced than ever that I had acted rightly in withholding from poor John my correspondence with his father. The lad had been

curious and inquisitive naturally, but when I told him that I thought it my duty to his father to be so reserved, he forbore to press me. I have only to add, first, that by all the inquiries I could make of the surviving members of Walter Ardworth's family, it seemed their full belief that he had never been married, and therefore I fear we must conclude that he had no legitimate children, which may account for, though it cannot excuse, his neglect; and secondly, with respect to the sums received on dear John's account—I put them all by, capital and interest, deducting only the expense of his first year at Cambridge, (the which I could not defray, without injuring my own children,) and it all stands in his name at Messrs. Drummonds', vested in the Three Per Cents. That I have not told him of this was by my poor dear wife's advice; for she said, very sensibly, and she was a shrewd woman on money matters, 'If he knows he has such a large sum all in the lump, who knows but he may grow idle and extravagant, and spend it at once, like his father before him; whereas, some time or other, he will want to marry, or need money for some particular purpose, —then what a blessing it will be!'

“However, my dear madam, as you know the world better than I do, you can now do as you please, both as to communicating to John all the information herein contained as to his parentage, and as to apprising him of the large sum of which he is lawfully possessed.

“ MATHEW FIELDEN.

“ P.S.—In justice to poor John Ardworth, and to show that whatever whim he may have conceived about his own child, he had still a heart kind enough to remember mine, though Heaven knows I said nothing about them in my letters, my eldest boy received an offer of an excellent place in a West India merchant’s house, and has got on to be chief clerk, and my second son was presented to a living of one hundred and seventeen pounds a-year, by a gentleman he never heard of. Though I never traced these good acts to Ardworth, from whom else could they come?”

Ardworth put down the paper without a word ; and Lucretia, who had watched him while he read, was struck with the self-control he evinced when he came to the end of the disclosure. She laid her hand on his, and said,

“ Courage !—you have lost nothing !”

“ Nothing !” said Ardworth, with a bitter smile.

“ A father’s love and a father’s name—nothing !”

“ But,” exclaimed Lucretia, “ is this man your father ? Does a father’s heart beat in one line of those hard sentences. No, no ; it seems to me probable—it seems to me almost certain, that you are—” she stopped, and continued with a calmer accent, “ near to my own blood. I am now in England—in London—to prosecute the inquiry built upon that hope. If so—if so—you shall—” Madame Dalibard again stopped abruptly, and there was something terrible in the very exultation of her countenance. She drew a long breath, and resumed, with an evident effort at self-command—“ If so, I have a right to the interest I feel for you. Suffer me yet to be silent as to the grounds of my belief, and—and—love me a little in the meanwhile !”

Her voice trembled, as if with rushing tears, at these last words, and there was almost an agony in the tone in which they were said, and in the gesture of the clasped hands she held out to him.

Much moved (amidst all his mingled emotions at the tale thus made known to him) by the

manner and voice of the narrator, Ardworth bent down and kissed the extended hands. Then he rose abruptly, walked to and fro the room, muttering to himself—paused opposite the window—threw it open, as for air, and, indeed, fairly gasped for breath. When he turned round, however, his face was composed, and folding his arms on his large breast with a sudden action, he said aloud, and yet rather to himself than to his listener,—

“What matter, after all, by what name men call our fathers! We ourselves make our own fate! Bastard or noble, not a jot care I. Give me ancestors, I will not disgrace them; raze from my lot even the very name of father, and my sons shall have an ancestor in me!”

As he thus spoke, there was a rough grandeur in his hard face and the strong ease of his powerful form. And while thus standing and thus looking, the door opened, and Varney walked in abruptly.

These two men had met occasionally at Madame Dalibard's, but no intimacy had been established between them. Varney was formal and distant to Ardworth, and Ardworth felt a repugnance to Varney. With the instinct of sound, sterling,

weighty natures, he detected at once, and disliked heartily, that something of gaudy, false, exaggerated, and hollow, which pervaded Gabriel Varney's talk and manner—even the trick of his walk, and the cut of his dress. And Ardworth wanted that boyish and beautiful luxuriance of character which belonged to Percival St. John, easy to please and to be pleased, and expanding into the warmth of admiration for all talent and all distinction. For art, if not the highest, Ardworth cared not a straw: it was nothing to him that Varney painted and composed, and ran showily through the jargon of literary babble, or toyed with the puzzles of unsatisfying metaphysics. He saw but a charlatan, and he had not yet learned from experience what strength and what danger lie hid in the boa parading its colours in the sun, and shifting, in the sensual sportiveness of its being, from bough to bough.

Varney halted in the middle of the room, as his eye rested first on Ardworth, and then glanced towards Madame Dalibard. But Ardworth, jarred from his reverie or resolves by the sound of a voice discordant to his ear at all times, especially in the mood which then possessed him, scarcely

returned Varney's salutation, buttoned his coat over his chest, seized his hat, and upsetting two chairs, and very considerably disturbing the gravity of a round table, forced his way to Madame Dalibard, pressed her hand, and said in a whisper, "I shall see you again soon," and vanished.

Varney, smoothing his hair with fingers that shone with rings, slid into the seat next Madame Dalibard, which Ardworth had lately occupied, and said, "If I were a Clytemnestra, I should dread an Orestes in such a son!"

Madame Dalibard shot towards the speaker one of the sidelong suspicious glances which of old had characterized Lucretia, and said,

"Clytemnestra was happy! The Furies slept to her crime, and haunted but the avenger."

"Hist!" said Varney.

The door opened, and Ardworth reappeared.

"I quite forgot, what I half came to know.—How is Helen? Did she return home safe?"

"Safe—yes!"

"Dear girl—I am glad to hear it! Where is she? Not gone to those Mivers' again! I am no aristocrat, but why should one couple together refinement and vulgarity?"

“ Mr. Ardworth,” said Madame Dalibard, with haughty coldness, “ my niece is under my care, and you will permit me to judge for myself how to discharge the trust. Mr. Mivers is her own relation—a nearer one than you are.”

Not at all abashed by the rebuke, Ardworth said carelessly, “ Well, I shall talk to you again on that subject. Meanwhile, pray give my love to her—Helen, I mean.”

Madame Dalibard half rose in her chair, then sunk back again, motioning with her hand to Ardworth to approach. Varney rose and walked to the window, as if sensible that something was about to be said not meant for his ear.

When Ardworth was close to her chair, Madame Dalibard grasped his hand with a vigour that surprised him, and drawing him nearer still, whispered as he bent down—

“ I will give Helen your love, if it is a cousin’s—or, if you will, a brother’s love. Do you intend—do you feel—another, a warmer love? Speak, sir!” and drawing suddenly back, she gazed on his face, with a stern and menacing expression, her teeth set, and the lips firmly pressed together.

Ardworth, though a little startled, and half

angry, answered with the low ironical laugh, not uncommon to him, "Pish! you ladies are apt to think us men much greater fools than we are. A briefless lawyer is not very inflammable tinder. Yes, a cousin's love—quite enough. Poor little Helen! time enough to put other notions into her head; and then—she will have a sweetheart, gay and handsome like herself!"

"Ay," said Madame Dalibard, with a slight smile, "ay, I am satisfied. Come soon."

Ardworth nodded, and hurried down the stairs. As he gained the door, he caught sight of Helen at a distance, bending over a flower-bed in the neglected garden. He paused, irresolute, a moment. "No," he muttered to himself; "no, I am fit company only for myself! A long walk into the fields, and then—away with these mists round the Past and Future; the Present at least is mine!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WEAVERS AND THE WOOF.

“AND what,” said Varney—“what, while we are pursuing a fancied clue, and seeking to provide first a name, and then a fortune for this young lawyer—what steps have you really taken to meet the danger that menaces *me*—to secure, if our inquiries fail, an independence for yourself? Months have elapsed, and you have still shrunk from advancing the great scheme upon which we built, when the daughter of Susan Mainwaring was admitted to your hearth.”

“Why recall me, in these rare moments when I feel myself human still—why recall me back to the nethermost abyss of revenge and crime? Oh! let me be sure that I have still a son! Even if John Ardworth, with his gifts and energies, be denied to me!—a son, though in rags, I will give him

wealth!—a son, though ignorant as the merest boor, I will pour into his brain my dark wisdom ! —a son—a son !—my heart swells at the word. Ah, you sneer ! Yes, my heart swells, but not with the mawkish fondness of a feeble mother. In a son, I shall live again—transmigrate from this tortured and horrible life of mine—drink back my youth. In him I shall rise from my fall—strong in his power—great in his grandeur. It is because I was born a woman—had woman's poor passions, and infirm weakness that I am what I am, —I would transfer myself into the soul of man—man who has the strength to act, and the privilege to rise. Into the bronze of man's nature I would pour the experience which has broken, with its fierce elements, the puny vessel of clay. Yes, Gabriel, in return for all I have done and sacrificed for you, I ask but co-operation in that one hope of my shattered and storm-beat being. Bear—fear—await—risk not that hope by some wretched peddling crime, which will bring on us both detection—some wanton revelry in guilt, which is not worth the terror that treads upon its heels.”

“ You forget,” answered Varney, with a kind of submissive sullenness, for whatever had passed

between these two persons in their secret and fearful intimacy, there was still a power in Lucretia, surviving her fall amidst the fiends, that impressed Varney with the only respect he felt for man or woman—"you forget strangely the nature of our elaborate and master project, when you speak of '*peddling crime*,' or '*wanton revelry*' in guilt! You forget, too, how every hour that we waste, deepens the peril that surrounds me, and may sweep from your side the sole companion that can aid you in your objects—nay, without whom, they must wholly fail. Let me speak first of that most urgent danger, for your memory seems short and troubled, since you have learned only to hope the recovery of your son. If this man, Stubmore, in whom the trust created by my uncle's will is now vested—once comes to town—once begins to bustle about his accursed projects of transferring the money from the Bank of England, I tell you again and again that my forgery on the bank will be detected, and that transportation will be the smallest penalty inflicted; part of the forgery, as you know, was committed on your behalf, to find the monies necessary for the research for your son—committed on the clear understanding, that our project on Helen

should repay me—should enable me, perhaps undetected, to restore the sums illegally abstracted, or, at the worst to confess to Stubmore, whose character I well know—that oppressed by difficulties, I had yielded to temptation—that I had forged his name (as I had forged his father's) as an authority to sell the capital from the bank, and that now, in replacing the money, I repaid my error, and threw myself on his indulgence—on his silence. I say, that I know enough of the man to know, that I should be thus cheaply saved, or at the worst, I should have but to strengthen his compassion by a bribe to his avarice. But if I cannot replace the money, I am lost."

"Well, well," said Lucretia, "the money you shall have, let me but find my son, and——"

"Grant me patience!" cried Varney, impetuously; "but what can your son do, if found, unless you endow him with the heritage of Laughton? To do that, Helen, who comes next to Percival St. John, in the course of the entail, must cease to live! Have I not aided—am I not aiding you hourly, in your grand objects? This evening I shall see a man whom I have long lost sight of, but who has acquired in a lawyer's life the true scent after evidence;—if that evidence exist, it shall be found.

I have just learned his address. By to-morrow he shall be on the track. I have stinted myself to save from the results of the last forgery the gold to whet his zeal. For the rest, as I have said, your design involves the removal of two lives. Already, over the one more difficult to slay, the shadow creeps and the pall hangs. I have won, as you wished and as was necessary, young St. John's familiar acquaintance; when the hour comes, he is in my hands."

Lucretia smiled sternly: "So!" she said, between her ground teeth, "the father forbade me the house that was my heritage! I have but to lift a finger and breathe a word, and, desolate as I am, I thrust from that home the son! The spoiler left me the world—I leave his son the grave!"

"But," said Varney, doggedly pursuing his dreadful object, "why force me to repeat that his is not the only life between you and your son's inheritance? St. John gone, Helen still remains. And what, if your researches fail, are we to lose the rich harvest which Helen will yield us—a harvest you reap with the same sickle which gathers in your revenge? Do you no longer see in Helen's face the features of her mother? Is the

perfidy of William Mainwaring forgotten or forgiven?"

"Gabriel Varney," said Lucretia, in a hollow and tremulous voice, "when in that hour in which my whole being was revulsed, and I heard the cord snap from the anchor, and saw the demons of the storm gather round my bark—when, in that hour, I stooped calmly down and kissed my rival's brow, I murmured an oath, which seemed not inspired by my own soul, but by an influence henceforth given to my fate—I vowed that the perfidy dealt to me should be repaid—I vowed that the ruin of my own existence should fall on the brow which I kissed. I vowed that if shame and disgrace were to supply the inheritance I had forfeited, I would not stand alone amidst the scorn of the pitiless world. In the vision of my agony, I saw, afar, the altar dressed, and the bride-chamber prepared, and I breathed my curse, strong as prophecy, on the marriage-hearth and the marriage-bed. Why dream, then, that I would rescue the loathed child of that loathed union from your grasp?—But is the time come? Yours may be come—is mine?"

Something so awful there was in the look of his accomplice—so intense in the hate of her low

voice—that Varney, wretch as he was, and contemplating at that very hour the foulest, and most hideous guilt, drew back, appalled.

Madame Dalibard resumed, and in a somewhat softer tone, but softened only by the anguish of despair—

“ Oh, had it been otherwise, what might I have been! Given over from that hour to the very incarnation of plotting crime—none to resist the evil impulse of my own maddening heart—the partner, forced on me by fate, leading me deeper and deeper into the inextricable hell—from that hour, fraud upon fraud, guilt upon guilt, infamy heaped on infamy, till I stand a marvel to myself that the thunderbolt falls not—that Nature thrusts not from her breast a living outrage on all her laws! Was I not justified in the desire of retribution? Every step that I fell, every glance that I gave to the gulf below, increased but in me the desire for revenge. All my acts had flowed from one fount—should the stream roll pollution, and the fount spring pure?”

“ You have had your revenge on your rival and her husband.”

“ I had it, and I passed on!” said Lucretia, with nostrils dilated as with haughty triumph;

“ They were crushed, and I suffered them to live ! Nay, when, by chance, I heard of William Mainwaring’s death, I bowed down my head, and I almost think I wept. The old days came back upon me. Yes, I wept ! But I had not destroyed their love. No, no ; there, I had miserably failed. A pledge of that love lived. I had left their hearth barren ; Fate sent them a comfort, which I had not foreseen. And suddenly my hate returned, my wrongs rose again, my vengeance was not sated. The love that had destroyed more than my life—my soul, rose again and cursed me in the face of Helen. The oath which I took when I kissed my rival’s brow, demanded another prey when I kissed the child of those nuptials.”

“ You are prepared at last, then, to act ?” cried Varney, in a tone of savage joy.

At that moment, close under the window, rose, sudden and sweet, the voice of one singing—the young voice of Helen. The words were so distinct that they came to the ears of the dark-plotting, and guilty pair. In the song itself there was little to remark, or peculiarly apposite to the consciences of those who heard ; yet in the extreme and touching purity of the voice, and in the

innocence of the general spirit of the words, trite as might be the image they conveyed, there was something that contrasted so fearfully their own thoughts and minds, that they sate silent, looking vacantly into each other's faces, and shrinking, perhaps to turn their eyes within themselves.

HELEN'S HYMN.

“Ye fade, yet still how sweet, ye Flowers !

Your scent outlives the bloom !

So, Father, may my mortal hours

Grow sweeter towards the tomb !

“In withered leaves a healing cure

The simple gleaners find ;

So may our withered hopes endure

In virtues left behind !

“Oh, not to me be vainly given

The lesson ye bestow,

Of thoughts that rise in sweets to Heaven,

And turn to use below.”

The song died, but still the listeners remained silent, till at length shaking off the effect, with his laugh of discordant irony, Varney said,—

“Sweet innocence, fresh from the nursery !
Would it not be sin to suffer the world to mar it ?

You hear the prayer—why not grant it, and let the flower ‘*turn to use below?*’”

“Ah, but could it wither first!” muttered Lucretia, with an accent of suppressed rage. “Do you think that her—that his—daughter, is to me but a vulgar life, to be sacrificed merely for gold? Imagine away your sex, man! Women only know what I—such as I, woman still—feel in the presence of the pure! Do you fancy that I should not have held death a blessing, if death could have found me in youth such as Helen is? Ah, could she but live to suffer! Die! Well, since it must be—since my son requires the sacrifice—do as you will with the victim that death mercifully snatches from my grasp. I could have wished to prolong her life, to load it with some fragment of the curse her parents heaped upon me!—baffled love, and ruin, and despair! I could have hoped in this division of the spoil, that mine had been the vengeance, if yours the gold. You want the life—I the heart;—the heart to torture first, and then—why then—more willingly than I do now, could I have thrown the carcase to the jackal!”

“Listen!” began Varney, when the door opened, and Helen herself stood unconsciously smiling at the threshold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAWYER AND THE BODY-SNATCHER.

THAT same evening, Beck, according to appointment, met Percival, and showed him the dreary-looking house, which held the fair stranger who had so attracted his youthful fancy. And Percival looked at the high walls, with the sailor's bold desire for adventure, while confused visions reflected from plays, operas, and novels, in which scaling walls with rope ladders and dark lanterns, was represented as the natural avocation of a lover, flitted across his brain;—and certainly he gave a deep sigh, as his common sense plucked him back from such romance. However, having now ascertained the house, it would be easy to learn the name of its inmates, and to watch or

make his opportunity. As slowly and reluctantly he walked back to the spot where he had left his cabriolet, he entered into some desultory conversation with his strange guide; and the pity he had before conceived for Beck, increased upon him, as he talked and listened. This benighted mind, only illumined by a kind of miserable astuteness, and that 'cunning of the belly' which is born of want to engender avarice—this joyless temperament—this age in youth—this living reproach, rising up from the stones of London against our social indifference to the souls which wither and rot under the hard eyes of science and the deaf ears of wealth, had a pathos for his lively sympathies and his fresh heart.

"If ever you want a friend, come to me," said St. John, abruptly.

The sweeper stared, and a gleam of diviner nature, a ray of gratitude and unselfish devotion, darted through the fog and darkness of his mind. He stood, with his hat off, watching the wheels of the cabriolet, as it bore away the happy child of fortune, and then shaking his head, as at some puzzle that perplexed and defied his comprehension, strode back to the town, and bent his way homeward.

Between two and three hours after Percival thus parted from the sweeper, a man whose dress was little in accordance with the scene in which we present him, threaded his way through a foul labyrinth of alleys in the worst part of St. Giles's: a neighbourhood, indeed, carefully shunned at dusk, by wealthy passengers; for here dwelt not only Penury in its grimmest shape, but the desperate and dangerous Guilt, which is not to be lightly encountered in its haunts and domiciles. Here children imbibe vice with their mother's milk. Here Prostitution, commencing with childhood, grows fierce and sanguinary in the teens, and leagues with theft and murder. Here slinks the pickpocket—here emerges the burglar—here skulks the felon. Yet all about and all around, here, too, may be found virtue in its rarest and noblest form—virtue outshining circumstance and defying temptation—the virtue of utter poverty, which groans and yet sins not. So interwoven are these webs of penury and fraud, that in one court your life is not safe, but turn to the right hand, and, in the other, you might sleep safely in that worse than Irish shealing, though your pockets were full of gold. Through these haunts, the

ragged and penniless may walk unfearing, for they have nothing to dread from the lawless—more, perhaps, from the law; but the wealthy, the respectable, the spruce, the dainty, let them beware the spot, unless the policeman is in sight, or day is in the skies!

As this passenger, whose appearance, as we have implied, was certainly not that of a denizen, turned into one of the alleys, a rough hand seized him by the arm, and suddenly a group of girls and tatterdemalions issued from a house, in which the lower shutters unclosed, showed a light burning, and surrounded him with a hoarse whoop.

The passenger whispered a word in the ear of the grim blackguard who had seized him, and his arm was instantly released.

“Hist! a pal: he has the catch,” said the blackguard, surlily. The group gave way, and by the light of the clear star-lit skies and a single lamp, hung at the entrance of the alley, gazed upon the stranger. But they made no effort to detain him; and as he disappeared in the distant shadows, hastened back into the wretched hostelry, where they had been merry-making. Meanwhile the stranger gained a narrow court, and

stopped before a house in one of its angles—a house taller than the rest—so much taller than the rest, that it had the effect of a tower; you would have supposed it (perhaps, rightly) to be the last remains of some ancient building of importance, around which, as population thickened and fashion changed, the huts below it had insolently sprung up. Quaint and massive pilasters, black with the mire and soot of centuries, flanked the deep-set door; the windows were heavy with mullions and transoms, and strongly barred in the lower floor; but few of the panes were whole, and only here and there had any attempts been made to keep out the wind and rain by rags, paper, old shoes, old hats, and other ingenious contrivances. Beside the door was conveniently placed a row of some ten or twelve bell-pulls, appertaining no doubt to the various lodgements, into which the building was subdivided. The stranger did not seem very familiar with the appurtenances of the place. He stood in some suspense, as to the proper bell to select, but at last guided by a brass-plate annexed to one of the pulls, which, though it was too dark to decipher the inscription, denoted a claim to superior gentility than

the rest of that nameless class, he hazarded a tug, which brought forth a larum loud enough to startle the whole court from its stillness.

In a minute or less, the casement in one of the upper stories opened, a head peered forth, and one of those voices peculiar to low debauch—raw, cracked, and hoarse—called out, “Who waits?”

“Is it you, Grabman?” asked the stranger, dubiously.

“Yes; Nicholas Grabman, attorney-at-law, sir, at your service: and your name?”

“Jason,” answered the stranger.

“Ho! there—ho! Beck,” cried the cracked voice, to some one within; “go down and open the door.”

In a few moments the heavy portal swung and creaked, and yawned sullenly, and a gaunt form, half undressed, with an inch of a farthing rush-light, glimmering through a battered lantern, in its hand, presented itself to Jason. The last eyed the ragged porter sharply.

“Do you live here?”

“Yes,” answered Beck, with the cringe habitual to him. “H-up the ladder, vith the rats, drat’em.”

“ Well, lead on—hold up the lantern ; a devil of a dark place this !” grumbled Jason, as he nearly stumbled over sundry broken chattels, and gained a flight of rude, black, broken stairs, that creaked under his tread.

“ ‘St! ‘st!’” said Beck, between his teeth, as the stranger, halting at the second floor, demanded, in no gentle tones, whether Mr. Grabman lived in the chimney-pots.

“ ‘St! ‘st!—don’t make such a rumpus, or No. 7 will be at you.”

“ What do I care for No. 7 ? and who the devil is No. 7 ?”

“ A Body-snatcher !” whispered Beck, with a shudder. “ He’s a dillicut sleeper, and can’t abide having his night’s rest sp’ilt. And he’s the houtrageoustest great cretur, when he’s h-up in his tantrums—it makes your air stand on ind to ear him !”

“ I should like very much to hear him, then,” said the stranger, curiously. And while he spoke the door of No. 7 opened abruptly. A huge head, covered with matted hair, was thrust for a moment through the aperture, and two dull eyes, that seemed covered with a film, like that of the birds

which feed on the dead, met the stranger's bold sparkling orbs.

"Hell and fury," bawled out the voice of this ogre, like a clap of near thunder, "if you two keep—tramp, tramp there, close at my door, I'll make you meat for the surgeons—b—— you!"

"Stop a moment, my civil friend," said the stranger, advancing; "just stand where you are; I should like to make a sketch of your head."

That head protruded farther from the door, and with it an enormous bulk of chest and shoulder. But the adventurous visitor was not to be daunted. He took out, very coolly, a pencil, and the back of a letter, and began his sketch.

The body-snatcher stared at him an instant, in mute astonishment; but that operation and the composure of the artist were so new to him, that they actually inspired him with terror. He slunk back—banged-to the door: And the stranger, putting up his implements, said, with a disdainful laugh, to Beck, who had slunk away into a corner—

"No. 7 knows well how to take care of No. 1. Lead on, and be quick, then!"

As they continued to mount, they heard the body-snatcher growling and blaspheming in his

den, and the sound made Beck clamber the quicker, till at the next landing-place, he took breath, threw open a door, and Jason, pushing him aside, entered first.

The interior of the room bespoke better circumstances than might have been supposed from the approach; the floor was covered with sundry scraps of carpets, formerly of different hues and patterns, but mellowed by time into one threadbare mass of grease and canvas. There was a good fire on the hearth, though the night was warm: there were sundry volumes piled round the walls, in the binding peculiar to law books; in a corner, stood a tall desk, of the fashion used by clerks, perched on tall slim legs, and companioned by a tall slim stool. On a table before the fire, were scattered the remains of the nightly meal; broiled bones, the skeleton of a herring; and the steam rose from a tumbler, containing a liquid, colourless as water, but poisonous as gin.

The room was squalid and dirty, and bespoke mean and slovenly habits, but it did not bespeak penury and want; it had even an air of filthy comfort of its own—the comfort of the swine in its warm sty. The occupant of the chamber

was in keeping with the localities. Figure to yourself a man of middle height—not thin, but void of all muscular flesh, bloated, puffed, unwholesome. He was dressed in a grey flannel gown and short breeches, the stockings wrinkled and distained, the feet in slippers. The stomach was that of a portly man, the legs those of a skeleton; the cheeks full and swollen, like a plough-boy's, but livid, bespeckled, of a dull lead-colour, like a patient in the dropsy. The head, covered in patches with thin, yellowish hair, gave some promise of intellect, for the forehead was high, and appeared still more so from partial baldness; the eyes, embedded in fat and wrinkled skin, were small and lustreless, but they still had that acute look which education and ability communicate to the human orb; the mouth most showed the animal—full-lipped, coarse, and sensual; while, behind one of two great ears stuck a pen.

You see before you, then, this slatternly figure—slip-shod, half-clothed, with a sort of shabby-demi-gentility about it—half raggamuffin, half clerk; while, in strong contrast, appeared the new-comer, scrupulously neat, new—with bright

black satin stock, coat cut jauntily to the waist, varnished boots, kid gloves, and trim moustache.

Behind this sleek and comely personage, on knock-knees, in torn shirt open at the throat, with apathetic, listless, unlighted face, stood the lean and gawkey Beck.

“Set a chair for the gentleman,” said the inmate of the chamber to Beck, with a dignified waive of the hand.”

“How do you do, Mr.—Mr.—humph—Jason?—how do you do?—always smart and blooming—the world thrives with you.”

“The world is a farm, that thrives with all who till it properly, Grabman,” answered Jason, drily, and with his handkerchief he carefully dusted the chair on which he then daintily deposited his person.

“But who is your Ganymede—your valet, your gentleman usher?”

“Oh! a lad about town, who lodges above! and does odd jobs for me—brushes my coat, cleans my shoes, and, after his day’s work, goes an errand now and then. Make yourself scarce, Beck!—Anatomy, vanish!”

Beck grinned, nodded, pulled hard at a flake of his hair, and closed the door.

“ One of your brotherhood, that?” asked Jason, carelessly.

“ He, oaf! — no,” said Grabman, with profound contempt in his sickly visage. “ He works for his bread!—instinct!—turnspits, and truffle-dogs, and some silly men have it!—What an age since we met—shall I mix you a tumbler?”

“ You know I never drink your vile spirits; though in Champagne and Bordeaux I am any man’s match.”

“ And how the devil do you keep old black thoughts out of your mind by those washy potations?”

“ Old black thoughts!—of what?”

“ Of black actions, Jason. We have not met since you paid me for recommending the nurse who attended your uncle in his last illness!”

“ Well, poor coward?”

Grabman knit his thin eyebrows, and gnawed his blubber lip—

“ I am no coward, as you know.”

“ Not when a thing is to be done, but after it is done. You brave the substance, and tremble at the shadow. I dare say you see ugly goblins in the dark, Grabman.”

“ Ay, ay; but it is no use talking to you. You

call yourself Jason, because of your yellow hair, or your love for the golden fleece; but your old comrades called you *Rattlesnake*, and you have its blood, as its venom."

"And its charm, man," added Jason, with a strange smile, that, though hypocritical and constrained, had yet a certain softness, and added greatly to the comeliness of features, which many might call beautiful, and all would allow to be regular and symmetrical. "I shall find at least ten love-letters on my table, when I go home. But enough of these fopperies: I am here on business."

"Law, of course; I am your man—who's the victim?" and a hideous grin on Grabman's face contrasted the sleek smile that yet lingered upon his visitor's.

"No; something less hazardous, but not less lucrative than our old practices. This is a business that may bring you hundreds, thousands—that may take you from this hovel, to speculate at the West End—that may change your gin into Lafitte, and your herring into venison—that may lift the broken attorney again upon the wheel,—again to roll down, it may be; but that is your affair."

“Fore Gad, open the case,” cried Grabman, eagerly, and, shoving aside the ignoble relics of his supper, he leaned his elbows on the table, and his chin on his damp palms, while eyes, that positively brightened into an expression of greedy and relentless intelligence, were fixed upon his visitor.

“The case runs thus,” said Jason: “Once upon a time, there lived, at an old house in Hampshire, called Laughton, a wealthy baronet named St. John. He was a bachelor—his estates at his own disposal. He had two nieces and a more distant kinsman. His eldest niece lived with him—she was supposed to be destined for his heiress; circumstances, needless to relate, brought upon this girl her uncle’s displeasure—she was dismissed his house. Shortly afterwards he died, leaving to his kinsman—a Mr. Vernon—his estates, with remainder to Vernon’s issue, and, in default thereof—first, to the issue of the younger niece, next to that of the elder and disinherited one. The elder married, and was left a widow, without children. She married *again*, and had a son. Her second husband, for some reason or other, conceived ill opinions of his wife. In his

last illness (he did not live long) he resolved to punish the wife by robbing the mother. He sent away the son—nor have we been able to discover him since. It is that son whom you are to find.”

“ I see, I see !—go on,” said Grabman. “ This son is now the remainder-man. How lost?—when?—what year?—what trace?”

“ Patience! You will find in this paper the date of the loss, and the age of the child, then a mere infant. Now for the trace. This husband—did I tell you his name?—no—Alfred Braddell—had one friend more intimate than the rest—John Walter Ardworth, a cashiered officer, a ruined man, pursued by bill-brokers, Jews, and bailiffs. To this man we have lately had reason to believe that the child was given. Ardworth, however, was shortly afterwards obliged to fly his creditors. We know that he went to India, but if residing there, it must have been under some new name, and we fear he is now dead. All our inquiries at least, after this man—have been fruitless. Before he went abroad, he left with his old tutor a child, corresponding in age to that of Mrs. Braddell’s. In this child, she thinks she recognises her son. All that you have to do is to trace his

identity, by good legal evidence—don't smile in that foolish way—I mean sound, *bonâ fide* evidence, that will stand the fire of cross-examination; you know what *that* is! You will therefore find out—first, whether Braddell did consign his child to Ardworth, and, if so, you must then follow Ardworth, with that child in his keeping, to Matthew Fielden's house, whose address you find noted in the paper I gave you, together with many other memoranda as to Ardworth's creditors, and those whom he is likely to have come across."

"John Ardworth, I see!"

"John *Walter* Ardworth, commonly called Walter; he, like me, preferred to be known only by his second baptismal name. He, because of a favourite Radical godfather—I, because Honoré is an inconvenient Gallicism, and perhaps when Honoré Mirabeau (*my* godfather) went out of fashion with the sans-culottes; my father thought Gabriel a safer designation. Now I have told you all!"

"What is the mother's maiden name?"

"Her maiden name was Clavering; she was married under that of Dalibard, her first husband."

"And," said Grabman, looking over the notes

in the paper given to him, "it is at Liverpool that the husband died, and whence the child was sent away?"

"It is so; to Liverpool you will go first. I tell you fairly, the task is difficult, for hitherto it has foiled me. I knew but one man who, without flattery, could succeed; and therefore I spared no pains to find out Nicholas Grabman. You have the true ferret's faculty; you, too, are a lawyer, and snuff evidence in every breath. Find up a son—a legal son—a son to be shown in a court of law, and the moment he steps into the lands and the Hall of Laughton, you have £5000."

"Can I have a bond to that effect?"

"My bond I fear is worth no more than my word. Trust to the last;—if I break it you know enough of my secrets to hang me!"

"Don't talk of hanging—I hate that subject. But stop—if found, does this son succeed? Did this Mr. Vernon leave no heir—this other sister continue single, or prove barren?"

"Oh, true! he, Mr. Vernon, who by will took the name of St. John,—he left issue—but only one son still survives, a minor and unmarried. The sister, too, left a daughter; both are poor sickly

creatures—their lives not worth a straw. Never mind them. You find Vincent Braddell, and he will not be long out of his property, nor you out of your £5000! You see, under these circumstances, a bond might become dangerous evidence !”

Grabman emitted a fearful and tremulous chuckle—a laugh, like the laugh of a superstitious man when you talk to him of ghosts and churchyards. He chuckled—and his hair bristled ! But after a pause, in which he seemed to wrestle with his own conscience, he said—“ Well, well—you are a strange man, Jason, you love your joke—I have nothing to do, except to find out this ultimate remainder-man—mind that !”

“ Perfectly ; nothing like subdivision of labour.”

“ The search will be expensive !”

“ There is oil for your wheels,” answered Jason, putting a note-book into his confidant’s hands. “ But mind, you waste it not ; no tricks, no false play, with me ;—you know Jason, or if you like the name better, you know the Rattlesnake !”

“ I will account for every penny,” said Grabman, eagerly, and clasping his hands, while his pale face grew livid.

“ I do not doubt it, my quill-driver. Look

sharp, start to-morrow! Get thyself decent clothes, be sober, cleanly, and respectable. Act as a man who sees before him five thousand pounds. And, now light me down stairs."

With the candle in his hand, Grabman stole down the rugged steps, even more timorously than Beck had ascended them, and put his finger to his mouth as they came in the dread vicinity of No. 7. But Jason, or rather Gabriel Varney, with that fearless, reckless bravado of temper, which, while causing half his guilt, threw at times a false glitter over its baseness, piqued by the cowardice of his comrade—gave a lusty kick at the closed door, and shouted out—"Old Grave-stealer, come out, and let me finish your picture. Out, out!—I say—out!" Grabman left the candle on the steps, and made but three bounds to his own room.

At the third shout of his disturber, the Resurrection-man threw open his door, violently, and appeared at the gap—the upward flare of the candle showing the deep lines ploughed in his hideous face, and the immense strength of his gigantic trunk and limbs. Slight, fair, and delicate as he was, Varney eyed him deliberately, and trembled not.

“What do you want with me?” said the terrible voice, tremulous with rage.

“Only to finish your portrait, as Pluto. He was the god of Hell, you know!”

The next moment, the vast hand of the ogre hung like a great cloud over Gabriel Varney. This last, ever on his guard, sprang aside, and the light gleamed on the steel of a pistol. “Hands off!—or——”

The click of the pistol cock finished the sentence. The ruffian halted. A glare of disappointed fury gave a momentary lustre to his dull eyes. “P’raps, I shall meet you agin one o’these days, or nights, and I shall know ye in ten thousand.”

“Nothing like a bird in the hand, Master Grave-stealer! Where can *we* ever meet again?”

“P’raps in the fields—p’raps on the road—p’raps at the Old Bailey—p’raps at the gallows—p’raps in the convict-ship, I knows what *that* is! I was chained night and day once to a chap jist like you—didn’t I break his spurit—didn’t I spile his sleep? Ho, ho!—you looks a bit less varmently howdacious now—my flash cove!”

Varney had not known one pang of fear, one

quicker beat of the heart before. But the image presented to his irritable fancy (always prone to brood over terrors)—the image of that companion—chained to him night and day—suddenly quelled his courage—the image stood before him palpably like the *Oulos Oneiros*—the Evil Dream of the Greeks.

He breathed loud. The body-stealer's stupid sense saw that he had produced the usual effect of terror, which gratified his brutal self-esteem; he retreated slowly, inch by inch, to the door, followed by Varney's appalled and staring eye—and closed it with such violence, that the candle was extinguished.

Varney, not daring—yes, literally, not daring—to call aloud to Grabman for another light, crept down the dark stairs with hurried, ghost-like steps—and, after groping at the door-handle with one hand, while the other grasped his pistol, with a strain of horror, he succeeded at last in winning access to the street, and stood a moment to collect himself, in the open air—the damps upon his forehead, and his limbs trembling like one who has escaped by a hair-breadth the crash of a falling house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RAPE OF THE MATTRESS.

THAT Mr. Grabman slept calmly that night, is probable enough, for his gin-bottle was empty the next morning; and it was with eyes more than usually heavy that he dozily followed the movements of Beck, who, according to custom, opened the shutters of the little den adjoining his sitting room, brushed his clothes, made his fire, set on the kettle to boil, and laid his breakfast things, preparatory to his own departure to the duties of the day. Stretching himself, however, and shaking off slumber, as the remembrance of the enterprise he had undertaken glanced pleasantly across him, Grabman sat up in his bed, and said in a voice that if not maudlin was affectionate, and if not affectionate was maudlin,—

“Beck, you are a good fellow! You have faults—you are human; *humanum est errare*, which means that you sometimes scorch my muffins. But, take you all in all, you are a kind creature. Beck, I am going into the country for some days. I shall leave my key in the hole in the wall—you know; take care of it when you come in. You were out late last night, my poor fellow. Very wrong! Look well to yourself, or who knows, you may be clutched by that blackguard Resurrection-man, No. 7. Well, well! to think of that Jason’s fool-hardiness. But he’s the worse devil of the two. Eh! what was I saying? And always give a look into my room every night before you go to roost. The place swarms with cracksmen, and one can’t be too cautious. Lucky dog, you, to have nothing to be robbed of!”

Beck winced at that last remark. Grabman did not seem to notice his confusion, and proceeded, as he put on his stockings, “And Beck, you are a good fellow, and have served me faithfully; when I come back, I will bring you something handsome—a backey box—or, who knows, a beautiful silver watch. Meanwhile, I think—let me see—yes, I *can* give you this elegant pair

of small clothes. Put out my best—the black ones. And now, Beck, I'll not keep you any longer."

The poor sweep, with many pulls at his forelock, acknowledged the munificent donation, and having finished all his preparations, hastened first to his room, to examine at leisure, and with great admiration, the drab small-clothes. *Room*, indeed, we can scarcely style the wretched enclosure which Beck called his own. It was at the top of the house, under the roof, and hot—oh, so hot, in the summer! It had one small begrimed window, through which the light of heaven never came, for the parapet, beneath which ran the choked gutter, prevented that. But the rain and the wind came in. So, sometimes, through four glassless panes, came a fugitive tom-cat. As for the rats, they held the place as their own. Accustomed to Beck, they cared nothing for him. They were the Mayors of that Palace—he only *le roi fainéant*. They ran over his bed at night; he often felt them on his face, and was convinced they would have eaten him, if there had been anything worth eating upon his bones; still, perhaps out of precaution rather than charity, he generally

left them a potato or two, or a crust of bread, to take off the edge of their appetites. But Beck was far better off than most who occupied the various settlements in that Alsatia—he had his room to himself. That was necessary to his sole luxury—the inspection of his treasury, the safety of his mattress; for it he paid, without grumbling, what he thought was a very high rent. To this hole in the roof there was no lock,—for a very good reason, there was no door to it. You went up a ladder, as you would go into a loft. Now, it had often been matter of much intense cogitation to Beck, whether or not he should have a door to this chamber; and the result of the cogitation was invariably the same—he dared not! What should he want with a door—a door with a lock to it—for one followed as a consequence to the other. Such a novel piece of grandeur would be an ostentatious advertisement that he had something to guard. He could have no pretence for it on the ground that he was intruded on by neighbours; no step but his own was ever caught by him ascending that ladder; it led to no other room. All the offices required for the lodgment he performed himself. His supposed poverty was a better safeguard than

doors of iron. Besides this, a door, if dangerous, would be superfluous; the moment it was suspected that Beck had something worth guarding, that moment all the picklocks and skeleton keys in the neighbourhood would be in a jingle. And a cracksman of high repute lodged already on the ground-floor. So Beck's treasure, like the bird's-nest, was deposited as much out sight as his instinct could contrive; and the locks and bolts of civilized man were equally dispensed with by bird and Beck.

On a rusty nail the sweep suspended the drab small-clothes, stroked them down lovingly, and murmured, "They be's too good for I—I should like to pop 'em! But wouldn't that be a shame? Beck, ben't you a hungrateful beast to go for to think of nothin' but the tin, ven your 'art ought to varm vith hemotion? I vill vear 'em ven I waits on him. Ven he sees his own smalls bringing in the muffins, he will say, 'Beck, you becomes 'em!' "

Fraught with this noble resolution, the sweep caught up his broom, crept down the ladder, and, with a furtive glance at the door of the room in which the cracksman lived, let himself out, and

shambled his way to his crossing. Grabman, in the meanwhile, dressed himself with more care than usual, shaved his beard from a four-day's crop, and, while seated at his breakfast, read attentively over the notes which Varney had left to him, pausing at times to make his own pencil memoranda. He then packed up such few articles as so moderate a worshipper of the Graces might require, deposited them in an old blue brief-bag; and this done, he opened his door, and creeping to the threshold listened carefully. Below, a few sounds might be heard; here, the wail of a child—there, the shrill scold of a woman, in that accent above all others adapted to scold—the Irish. Farther down still, the deep bass oath of the choleric Resurrection-man; but above, all was silent. Only one floor intervened between Grabman's apartment and the ladder that led to Beck's loft. And the inmates of that room gave no sound of life. Grabman took courage, and, shuffling off his shoes, ascended the stairs; he passed the closed door of the room above—he seized the ladder with a shaking hand—he mounted, step after step—he stood in Beck's room.

Now, O Nicholas Grabman, some moralists may be harsh enough to condemn thee for what thou art doing: kneeling yonder, in the dim light, by that curtainless pallet, with greedy fingers feeling here and there, and a placid, self-hugging smile upon thy pale lips. That poor vagabond, whom thou art about to despoil, has served thee well and faithfully, has borne with thine ill humours, thy sarcasms, thy swearings, thy kicks and buffets—often, when in the bestial sleep of drunkenness, he has found thee stretched helpless on thy floor, with a kindly hand he has moved away the sharp fender, too near that knavish head, now bent on his ruin; or closed the open window, lest the keen air, that thy breath tainted, should visit thee with rheum and fever. Small has been his guerdon for uncomplaining sacrifice of the few hours spared to the weary drudge from his daily toil—small, but gratefully received. And if Beck had been taught to pray, he would have prayed for thee, as for a good man, O miserable sinner! And thou art going now, Nicholas Grabman, upon an enterprise which promises thee large gains, and thy purse is filled; and thou wantest nothing for thy wants, or thy swinish

luxuries. Why should those shaking fingers itch for the poor beggar-man's hoards?

But hadst thou been bound on an errand that would have given thee a million, thou wouldst not have left unrifled that secret store which thy prying eye had discovered, and thy hungry heart had coveted. No; since one night, fatal, alas! to the owner of loft and treasure, when, needing Beck for some service, and fearing to call aloud, (for the Resurrection-man in the floor below thee, whose oaths even now ascend to thine ear, sleeps ill, and has threatened to make thee mute for ever if thou disturbest him in the few nights in which his dismal calling suffers him to sleep at all)—thou didst creep up the ladder, and didst see the unconscious miser at his nightly work, and, after the sight, didst steal down again, smiling—no; since that night, no schoolboy ever more rootedly and ruthlessly set his mind upon nest of linnet, than thine was set upon the stores in Beck's mattress.

And yet, why, O lawyer, should rigid moralists blame thee more than such of thy tribe as live honoured and respectable, upon the frail and the poor? Who among them ever left loft or mattress while a rap could be wrung from either?

Matters it to Astræa, whether the spoliation be made, thus nakedly and briefly, or by all the acknowledged forms in which item on item, six-and-eightpence on six-and-eightpence, the inexorable hand closes, at length, on the last farthing of duped despair? Not—Heaven forbid!—that we make thee, foul Nicholas Grabman, a type for all the class called attorneys-at-law! Noble hearts, liberal minds, are there amongst that brotherhood, we know, and have experienced; but a type art thou of those whom want, and error, and need have proved—alas, too well!—the lawyers of the poor. And even while we write, and even while ye read, many a Grabman steals from helpless toil the savings of a life.

Ye poor hoards—darling delights of your otherwise joyless owner—how easily has his very fondness made ye the prey of the spoiler! How gleefully when the pence swelled into a shilling have they been exchanged into the new bright piece of silver, the newest and brightest that could be got! then the shillings into crowns, then the crowns into gold—got slily and at a distance, and contemplated with what rapture!—so that, at last, the total lay manageable and light in its radiant

compass. And what a total !—what a surprise to Grabman ! Had it been but a sixpence, he would have taken it ; but to grasp sovereigns by the handful, it was too much for him ; and, as he rose, he positively laughed, from a sense of fun.

But amongst his booty, there was found one thing that specially moved his mirth—it was a child's coral, with its little bells. Who could have given Beck such a bauble—or how Beck could have refrained from turning it into money would have been a fit matter for speculation. But it was not that at which Grabman chuckled ; he laughed, first, because it was an emblem of the utter childishness and folly of the creature he was leaving penniless ; and, secondly, because it furnished his ready wit with a capital contrivance to shift Beck's indignation from his own shoulders to a party more liable to suspicion. He left the coral on the floor near the bed, stole down the ladder, reached his own room, took up his brief-bag, locked his door, slipped the key in the rat-hole, where the trusty, plundered Beck alone could find it, and went boldly down stairs ; passing successively the doors, within which still stormed the Resurrection-man, still wailed the child, still shrieked the Irish shrew ; he paused at the

ground-floor occupied by Bill the cracksman, and his long-fingered, slender, quick-eyed imps, trained already to pass through broken window panes, on their precocious progress to the hulks.

The door was open, and gave a pleasant sight of the worthy family within. Bill, himself, a stout-looking fellow, with a florid, jolly countenance, and a pipe in his mouth, was sitting at his window, with his brawny legs lolling on a table covered with the remains of a very tolerable breakfast. Four small Bills were employed in certain sports, which no doubt, according to the fashionable mode of education, instilled useful lessons under the artful guise of playful amusement. Against the wall at one corner of the room was affixed a row of bells, from which were suspended exceedingly tempting apples by slender wires. Two of the boys were engaged in the innocent entertainment of extricating the apples without occasioning any alarm from the bells; a third was amusing himself at a table, covered with mock rings and trinkets, in a way that seemed really surprising; with the end of a finger dipped probably in some glutinous matter, he just touched one of the gew-gaws, and lo, it vanished!—vanished so magically, that the

quickest eye could scarcely trace whither; sometimes up a cuff, sometimes into a shoe—here, there, anywhere—except back again upon the table. The fourth, an urchin apparently about five years old; he might be much younger, judging from his stunted size; somewhat older, judging from the vicious acuteness of his face, on the floor under his father's chair, was diving his little hand into the paternal pockets in search for a marble, sportively hidden in those capacious recesses. On the rising geniuses around him, Bill, the cracksman, looked, and his father's heart was proud.

Pausing at the threshold, Grabman looked in, and said, cheerfully, "Good day to you—good day to you all, my little dears."

"Ah, Grabman," said Bill, rising, and making a bow, for Bill valued himself much on his politeness—"come to blow a cloud, eh? Bob!" (this to the eldest born;) "manners, sir; wipe your nose, and set a chair for the gent."

"Many thanks to you Bill, but I can't stay now—I have a long journey to take. But bless my soul, how stupid I am; I have forgotten my clothes-brush. I knew there was something on

my mind all the way I was coming down stairs. I was saying to myself, 'Grabman, there is something forgotten!'

"I know what that ere feelin' is," said Bill, thoughtfully; "I had it myself the night afore last; and sure enough when I got to the—but that's neither here nor there. Bob, run up stairs, and fetch down Mr. Grabman's clothes-brush. 'Tis the least you can do for a gent who saved your father from the fate of them ere innocent apples,—your fist, Grabman. I have a heart in my buzzom;—cut me open, and you will find there '*Halibi* and Grabman!' Give Bob your key."

"The brush is not in my room," answered Grabman; "it is at the top of the house; up the ladder, in Beck's loft—Beck, the sweeper. The stupid dog always keeps it there, and forgot to give it me. Sorry to occasion my friend Bob so much trouble."

"Bob has a soul above trouble; his father's heart beats in his buzzom. Bob, track the dancers. Up like a lark—and down like a dump!"

Bob grinned, made a mow at Mr. Grabman, and scampered up the stairs.

"You never attends our free-and-easy," said Bill; "but we toasts you, with three times three, and up standing.' Tis a hungrateful world! But some men has a heart; and, to those who has a heart, Grabman is a trump!"

"I am sure, whenever I can do you a service, you may reckon on me. Meanwhile, if you could get that cursed bullying fellow who lives under me to be a little more civil, you would oblige me."

"Under you! No. 7? No. 7—is it? Grabman, h-am I a man? Is this a h-arm, and this a bunch of fives? I dare's do all that does become a man; but No. 7 is a body-snatcher! No. 7 has bullied me—and I bore it! No. 7 might whop me—and this h-arm would let him whop! He lives with graves, and churchyards, and stiff 'uns—that damnable No. 7! Ask some'at else, Grabman. I dares not touch No. 7 any more than the ghosteses."

Grabman sneered as he saw that Bill, stout rogue as he was, turned pale while he spoke; but at that moment Bob reappeared with the clothes-brush, which the ex-attorney thrust into his pocket; and shaking Bill by the hand, and patting Bob on the head, he set out on his journey.

Bill reseated himself, muttering, "Bully a body-snatcher! 'drot that Grabman, does he want to get rid of poor Bill?"

Meanwhile Bob exhibited slily, to his second brother, the sight of Beck's stolen coral. The children took care not to show it to their father. They were already inspired by the laudable ambition to set up in business on their own account.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERCIVAL VISITS LUCRETIA.

HAVING once ascertained the house in which Helen lived, it was no difficult matter for St. John to learn the name of the guardian whom Beck had supposed to be her mother. No common delight mingled with Percival's amaze, when in that name he recognised one borne by his own kinswoman. Very little, indeed, of the family history was known to him. Neither his father nor his mother ever willingly conversed of the fallen heiress—it was a subject which the children had felt to be proscribed; but in the neighbourhood, Percival had, of course, heard some mention of Lucretia, as the haughty and accomplished Miss Clavering—who had, to the astonishment of all,

stooped to a *mésalliance* with her uncle's French librarian. That her loss of the St. John property, the succession of Percival's father, were unexpected by the villagers and squires around, and perhaps set down to the caprice of Sir Miles, or to an intellect impaired by apoplectic attacks, it was not likely that he should have heard. The rich have the polish of their education, and the poor that instinctive tact so wonderful amongst the agricultural peasantry, to prevent such unmannerly disclosures or unwelcome hints ; and, both by rich and poor, the Vernon St. Johns were too popular and respected for wanton allusions to subjects calculated to pain them. All, therefore, that Percival knew of his relation, was that she had resided from infancy with Sir Miles ; that after their uncle's death, she had married an inferior in rank, of the name of Dalibard, and settled abroad ; that she was a person of peculiar manners ; and, he had heard somewhere, of rare gifts. He had been unable to learn the name of the young lady staying with Madame Dalibard ; he had learned only that she went by some other name, and was not the daughter of the lady who rented the house. Certainly, it was possible that

this last night not be his kinswoman, after all. The name, though strange to English ears, and not common in France, was no sufficient warrant for Percival's high spirits at the thought that he had now won legitimate and regular access to the house—still it allowed him to call; it furnished a fair excuse for a visit.

How long he was at his toilet that day, poor boy! How sedulously, with comb and brush, he sought to smoothe into straight precision that luxuriant labyrinth of jetty curls, which had never cost him a thought before! Gil Blas says that the toilet is a pleasure to the young though a labour to the old; Percival St. John's toilet was no pleasure to him that anxious morning.

At last, he tore himself, dissatisfied and desperate, from the glass, caught his hat and his whip, threw himself on his horse, and rode, at first very fast and at last very slowly, to the old, decayed, shabby, neglected house, that lay hid, like the poverty of fallen pride, amidst the trim villas and smart cottages of fair and flourishing Brompton.

The same servant who had opened the gate to Ardworth appeared to his summons, and, after

eyeing him for some moments with a listless stupid stare, said, "You'll be after some mistake!" and turned away.

"Stop—stop!" cried Percival, trying to intrude himself through the gate; but the servant blocked up the entrance sturdily. "It is no mistake at all, my good lady. I have come to see Madame Dalibard, my—my relation!"

"Your relation!" and again the woman stared at Percival with a look through the dull vacancy of which some distrust was dimly perceptible. "Bide a bit there, and give us your name."

Percival gave his card to the servant, with his sweetest and most persuasive smile. She took it with one hand, and, with the other, turned the key in the gate, leaving Percival outside. It was five minutes before she returned, and she then, with the same prim, smileless expression of countenance opened the gate, and motioned him to follow.

The kind-hearted boy sighed as he cast a glance at the desolate and poverty-stricken appearance of the house, and thought within himself—"Ah, pray Heaven, she may be my relation, and then I shall have the right to find her, and that sweet girl, a very different home!" The old

woman threw open the drawing-room door, and Percival was in the presence of his deadliest foe! The arm-chair was turned towards the entrance, and from amidst the coverings that hid the form, the remarkable countenance of Madame Dalibard emerged, sharp and earnest, directly fronting the intruder.

"So," she said slowly, and, as it were, devouring him with her keen, steadfast eyes—"so, you are Percival St. John! Welcome! I did not know that we should ever meet. I have not sought you—you seek me! Strange—yes, strange—that the young and the rich should seek the suffering and the poor!"

Surprised and embarrassed by this singular greeting, Percival halted abruptly in the middle of the room; and there was something inexpressibly winning in his shy, yet graceful confusion. It seemed, with silent eloquence, to apologize and to deprecate. And when, in his silvery voice, scarcely yet tuned to the fulness of manhood, he said, feelingly, "Forgive me, Madam, but my mother is not in England,"—the excuse evinced such delicacy of idea, so exquisite a sense of high breeding, that the calm assurance of

worldly ease could not have more attested the chivalry of the native gentleman.

“ I have nothing to forgive, Mr. St. John,” said Lucretia, with a softened manner. “ Pardon me rather, that my infirmities do not allow me to rise to receive you. This seat,—here,—next to me. You have a strong likeness to your father.”

Percival received this last remark as a compliment, and bowed. Then, as he lifted his ingenuous brow, he took, for the first time, a steady view of his new found relation. The peculiarities of Lucretia’s countenance in youth had naturally deepened with middle-age. The contour, always too sharp and pronounced, was now strong and bony as a man’s: the line between the eyebrows was hollowed into a furrow. The eye retained its old uneasy, sinister, side-long glance; or, at rare moments, (as when Percival entered,) its searching penetration, and assured command; but the eyelids themselves, red and injected, as with grief or vigil, gave something haggard and wild, whether to glance or gaze. Despite the paralysis of the frame, the face, though pale and thin, showed no bodily decay. A vigour surpassing the strength of woman, might still be seen in the

play of the bold muscles, the firmness of the contracted lips. What physicians call '*vitality*,' and trace at once (if experienced) on the physiognomy, as the prognostic of long life, undulated restlessly in every aspect of the face, every movement of those thin nervous hands, which, contrasting the rest of that motionless form, never seemed to be at rest. The teeth were still white and regular, as in youth ; and when they shone out in speaking, gave a strange, unnatural freshness to a face otherwise so worn.

As Percival gazed, and, while gazing, saw those wandering eyes bent down, and yet *felt* they watched him, a thrill, almost of fear, shot through his heart. Nevertheless, so much more impressionable was he to charitable and trustful, than to suspicious and timid emotions, that, when Madame Dalibard, suddenly looking up, and shaking her head gently, said—

“You see but a sad wreck, young kinsman,” all those instincts, which nature itself seemed to dictate for self-preservation, vanished into heavenly tenderness and pity.

“Ah !” he said, rising and pressing one of those deadly hands in both his own, while tears rose to

his eyes. "Ah! since you call me kinsman, I have all a kinsman's privileges. You must have the best advice—the most skilful surgeons. Oh, you will recover—you must not despond."

Lucretia's lips moved uneasily. This kindness took her by surprise. She turned desperately away from the human gleam that shot across the sevenfold gloom of her soul: "Do not think of me," she said, with a forced smile: "it is my peculiarity not to like allusion to myself, though this time I provoked it. Speak to me of the old cedar trees at Laughton—do they stand still? You are the master of Laughton, now:—it is a noble heritage!"

Then, St. John, thinking to please her, talked of the old manor-house, described the improvements made by his father, spoke gaily of those which he himself contemplated; and as he ran on, Lucretia's brow, a moment ruffled, grew smooth and smoother, and the gloom settled back upon her soul.

All at once, she interrupted him. "How did you discover me—was it through Mr. Varney? I bade him not mention me—yet how else could you learn?" As she spoke, there was an anxious

trouble in her tone, which increased, while she observed that St. John looked confused.

“Why,” he began, hesitatingly, and brushing his hat with his hand; “why—perhaps you may have heard from the—that is—I think there is a young ——. Ah, it is you—it is you! I see you once again!” And springing up, he was at the side of Helen, who at that instant had entered the room, and now, her eyes downcast, her cheeks blushing, her breast gently heaving,—heard, but answered not that passionate burst of joy.

Startled, Madame Dalibard (her hands firmly grasping the sides of her chair) contemplated the two. She had heard nothing, guessed nothing of their former meeting. All that had passed before between them was unknown to her. Yet, there, was evidence unmistakeable, conclusive—the son of her despoiler loved the daughter of her rival, and—if the virgin heart speaks by the outward sign—those downcast eyes, those blushing cheeks, that heaving breast, told that he did not love in vain!

Before her lurid and murderous gaze, as if to defy her, the two inheritors of a revenge un-

glutted by the grave—stood, united mysteriously together. Up, from the vast ocean of her hate, rose that poor isle of love; there, unconscious of the horror around them—the victims found their footing! How beautiful at that hour their youth—their very ignorance of their own emotions—their innocent gladness—their sweet trouble! The fell gazer drew a long breath of fiend-like complacency and glee, and her hands opened wide, and then slowly closed, as if she felt them in her grasp.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROSE BENEATH THE UPAS.

AND from that day, Percival had his privileged entry into Madame Dalibard's house. The little narrative of the circumstances connected with his first meeting with Helen, partly drawn from Percival, partly afterwards from Helen, (with blushing and faltered excuses from the latter, for not having mentioned before an incident that might, perhaps needlessly, vex or alarm her aunt in so delicate a state of health,) was received by Lucretia with rare graciousness. The connexion, not only between herself and Percival, but between Percival and Helen, was allowed, and even dwelt upon by Madame Dalibard, as a natural reason for permitting the artless intimacy which imme-

diately sprang up between these young persons. She permitted Percival to call daily, to remain for hours, to share in their simple meals, to wander alone with Helen in the garden, assist her to bind up the ragged flowers, and sit by her in the old ivy-grown arbour, when their work was done. She affected to look upon them both as children, and to leave to them that happy familiarity which childhood only sanctions, and compared to which the affection of maturer years seems at once coarse and cold.

As they grew more familiar, the differences and similarities in their characters came out, and nothing more delightful than the harmony into which even the contrasts blended, ever invited the guardian angel to pause and smile. As flowers in some trained parterre relieve each other, now softening, now heightening each several hue, till all unite in one concord of interwoven beauty, so these two blooming natures, brought together, seemed, where varying still, to melt and fuse their affluences into one wealth of innocence and sweetness. Both had a native buoyancy and cheerfulness of spirit, a noble trustfulness in others, a singular candour, and freshness of mind and feel-

ing. But beneath the gaiety of Helen, there was a soft and holy under-stream of thoughtful melancholy, a high and religious sentiment that vibrated more exquisitely to the subtle mysteries of creation—the solemn unison between the bright world without, and the grave destinies of that world within, (which is an imperishable soul,) than the lighter and more vivid youthfulness of Percival had yet conceived. In him, lay the germs of the active mortal, who might win distinction in the bold career we run upon the surface of the earth. In her, there was that finer and more spiritual essence which lifts the poet to the golden atmosphere of dreams, and reveals in glimpses to the saint the choral Populace of Heaven. We do not say that Helen would ever have found the utterance of the poet, that her reveries, undefined and unanalysed, could have taken the sharp, clear form of words. For to the poet, practically developed and made manifest to the world, many other gifts, besides the mere poetic sense, are needed; stern study, and logical generalization of scattered truths, and patient observation of the characters of men, and the wisdom that comes from sorrow and passion, and a sage's experience of things

actual, embracing the dark secrets of human infirmity and crime. But, despite all that has been said in disparagement or disbelief of "mute inglorious Miltons," we maintain that there are natures in which the divinest element of poetry exists, the purer and more delicate for escaping from bodily form, and evaporating from the coarser vessels into which the poet, so called, must pour the ethereal fluid. There is a certain virtue within us, comprehending our subtlest and noblest emotions, which is poetry while untold, and grows pale and poor in proportion as we strain it into poems. Nay, it may be said of this airy property of our inmost being, that, more or less, it departs from us, according as we give it forth into the world, even, as only by the loss of its particles, the rose wastes its perfume on the air. So this more spiritual sensibility dwelt in Helen, as the latent mesmerism in water, as the invisible fairy in an enchanted ring. It was an essence or divinity, shrined and shrouded in herself, which gave her more intimate and vital union with all the influences of the universe, a companion to her loneliness, an angel hymning low to her own listening soul. This made her enjoyment of Nature,

in its merest trifles, exquisite and profound ; this gave to her tenderness of heart all the delicious and sportive variety love borrows from imagination ; this lifted her piety above the mere forms of conventional religion, and breathed into her prayers the ecstasy of the saint.

But Helen was not the less filled with the sweet humanities of her age and sex ; her very gravity was tinged with rosy light, as a western cloud with the sun. She had sportiveness, and caprice, and even whim, as the butterfly, though the emblem of the soul, still flutters wantonly over every wild flower, and expands its glowing wings on the sides of the beaten road. And with a sense of weakness in the common world, (growing out of her very strength in nobler atmospheres,) she leaned the more trustfully on the strong arm of her young adorer ; not fancying that the difference between them arose from superiority in her,—but rather as a bird once tamed, flies at the sight of the hawk to the breast of its owner ; so from each airy flight into the loftier heaven, let but the thought of danger daunt her wing, and, as in a more powerful nature, she took refuge on that fostering heart.

The love between these children, for so, if not

literally in years, in their newness to all that steals the freshness and the dew from maturer life, they may be rightly called, was such as befitted those whose souls have not forfeited the Eden. It was more like the love of fairies than of human beings. They showed it to each other, innocently and frankly; yet of love, as we of the grosser creation call it, with its impatient pains, and burning hopes, they never spoke nor dreamed. It was an unutterable, ecstatic fondness—a clinging to each other—in thought, desire, and heart—a joy more than mortal in each other's presence; yet, in parting, not that idle and empty sorrow which unfits the weak for the homelier demands on time and life. And this, because of the wondrous trust in themselves, and in the future, which made a main part of their credulous happy natures. Neither felt fear nor jealousy—or if jealousy came, it was the pretty childlike jealousies, which have no sting—of the bird, if Helen listened to its note too long—of the flower, if Percival left Helen's side too quickly, to tie up its drooping petals, or refresh its dusty leaves. Close by the stir of the great city, with all its fret, and chafe, and storm of life—in the desolate garden of that sombre

house, and under the withering eyes of relentless Crime, revived the Arcady of old—the scene vocal to the reeds of idyllist and shepherd : and in the midst of the iron Tragedy, harmlessly and unconsciously arose the strain of the Pastoral Music.

It would be a vain effort to describe the state of Lucretia's mind, while she watched the progress of the affection she had favoured, and gazed on the spectacle of the fearless happiness she had promoted. The image of a felicity at once so great and so holy, wore to her gloomy sight the aspect of a mocking Fury. It rose in contrast to her own ghastly and crime-stained life ; it did not upbraid her conscience with guilt so loudly as it scoffed at her intellect for folly. These children, playing on the verge of life, how much more of life's true secret did they already know, than she, with all her vast native powers and wasted realms of blackened and charred experience ! For what had she studied and schemed, and calculated, and toiled, and sinned ? As a conqueror stricken unto death would render up all the regions vanquished by his sword for one drop of water to his burning lips, how gladly would she have given all the knowledge bought

with blood and fire, to feel one moment as those children felt ! Then, from out her silent and grim despair, stood forth, fierce and prominent, the great fiend, Revenge.

By a monomania, not uncommon to those who have made *self* the centre of being, Lucretia referred to her own sullen history of wrong and passion, all that bore analogy to it, however distant. She had never been enabled, without an intolerable pang of hate and envy, to contemplate courtship and love in others. From the rudest shape to the most refined—that master-passion in the existence, at least, of woman—reminding her of her own brief episode of human tenderness and devotion, opened every wound, and wrung every fibre of a heart that, while crime had indurated it to most emotions, memory still left morbidly sensitive to one. But if tortured by the sight of love in those who had had no connexion with her fate—who stood apart from her lurid orbit, and were gazed upon only afar, (as a lost soul, from the abyss, sees the gleam of angels' wings within some planet it never has explored,) how ineffably more fierce and intolerable was the wrath that seized her, when, in her haunted imagination, she saw all

Susan's rapture at the vows of Mainwaring mantling in Helen's face! All that might have disarmed a heart as hard, but less diseased, less preoccupied by revenge, only irritated more the consuming hate of that inexorable spirit. Helen's seraphic purity—her exquisite overflowing kindness, ever forgetting self—her airy cheerfulness—even her very moods of melancholy, calm and seemingly causeless as they were, perpetually galled and blistered that writhing preternatural susceptibility which is formed by the consciousness of infamy, the dreary egotism of one cut off from the charities of the world, with whom all mirth is sardonic convulsion, all sadness, rayless, and unresigned despair.

Of the two, Percival inspired her with feelings the most akin to humanity. For him, despite her bitter memories of his father, she felt something of compassion, and shrank from the touch of his frank hand in remorse. She had often need to whisper to herself, that his life was an obstacle to the heritage of the son; of whom, as we have seen, she was in search, and whom, indeed, she believed she had already found in John Ardworth; that it was not in wrath and in vengeance that *this* victim

was to be swept into the grave, but as an indispensable sacrifice to a cherished object—a determined policy. As in the studies of her youth, she had adopted the Machiavelism of ancient state-craft as a rule admissible in private life, so she seemed scarcely to admit as a crime that which was but the removal of a barrier between her aim and her end. Before she had become personally acquainted with Percival, she had rejected all occasion to know him. She had suffered Varney to call upon him, as the old *protegé* of Sir Miles, and to wind into his intimacy—meaning to leave to her accomplice, when the hour should arrive, the dread task of destruction. This, not from cowardice, for Gabriel had once rightly described her when he said, that ‘if she lived with shadows she could quell them,’ but simply because, more intellectually unsparing than constitutionally cruel, (save where the old vindictive memories thoroughly unsexed her), this was a victim whose pangs she desired not to witness, over whose fate it was no luxury to gloat and revel. She wished not to see, nor to know him *living*, only to learn that he was no more, and that Helen alone stood between Laughton and her son. Now that he had himself,

as if with predestined feet, crossed her threshold—that he, like Helen, had delivered himself into her toils, the hideous guilt, before removed from her hands, became haunting, fronted her face to face, and filled her with a superstitious awe.

Meanwhile, her outward manner to both her meditated victims, if moody and fitful at times, was not such as would have provoked suspicion even in less credulous hearts. From the first entry of Helen under her roof, she had been formal and measured in her welcome—kept her, as it were, aloof, and affected no prodigal superfluity of dissimulation; but she had never been positively harsh or unkind in word or in deed, and had coldly excused herself for the repulsiveness of her manner.

“I am irritable,” she said, “from long suffering; I am unsocial from habitual solitude; do not expect from me the fondness and warmth that should belong to our relationship. Do not harass yourself with vain solicitude for one whom all seeming attention but reminds more painfully of infirmity, and who, even thus stricken down, would be independent of all cares not bought and paid for. Be satisfied to live here in all reasonable

liberty, to follow your own habits and caprices uncontrolled. Regard me but as a piece of necessary furniture. You can never displease me, but when you notice that I live and suffer."

If Helen wept bitterly at these hard words when first spoken, it was not with anger that her loving heart was so thrown back upon herself. On the contrary, she became inspired with a compassion so great that it took the character of reverence. She regarded this very coldness as a mournful dignity. She felt grateful that one who could thus dispense with, should yet have sought, her. She had heard her mother say that "she had been under great obligations to Lucretia;" and now, when she was forbidden to repay them, even by a kiss on those weary eyelids, a daughter's hand to that sleepless pillow; when she saw that the barrier first imposed was irremovable—that no time diminished the distance her aunt set between them—that the least approach to the tenderness of service beyond the most casual offices, really seemed but to fret those excitable nerves, and fever the hand, that she ventured timorously to clasp; she retreated into herself with a sad amaze that increased her pity, and

heightened her respect. To her, love seemed so necessary a thing in the helplessness of human life, even when blessed with health and youth, that this rejection of all love in one so bowed and crippled, struck her imagination as something sublime in its dreary grandeur and stoic pride of independence. She regarded it, as of old a tender and pious nun would have regarded the asceticism of some sanctified recluse—as Teresa (had she lived in the same age) might have regarded St. Simon Stylites existing aloft from human sympathy on the roofless summit of his column of stone: And with this feeling she sought to inspire Percival. He had the heart to enter into her compassion, but not the imagination to sympathize with her reverence. Even the repugnant awe that he had first conceived for Madame Dalibard, so bold was he by temperament, he had long since cast off: he recognised only the moroseness and petulance of an habitual invalid, and shook playfully his glossy curls, when Helen, with her sweet seriousness, insisted on his recognising more.

To this house few, indeed, were the visitors admitted. The Mivers's, whom the benevolent

officiousness of Mr. Fielden had originally sent thither to see their young kinswoman, now and then came to press Helen to join some party to the theatre, or Vauxhall, or a *pic-nic* in Richmond park; but when they found their overtures, which had at first been politely accepted by Madame Dalibard, were rejected, they gradually ceased their visits, wounded and indignant.

Certain it was, that Lucretia had, at one time, eagerly caught at their well-meant civilities to Helen—*now* she as abruptly declined them. Why? It would be hard to plumb into all the black secrets of that heart. It would have been but natural to her, who shrank from dooming Helen to no worse calamity than a virgin's grave, to have designed to throw her in such uncongenial guidance, amidst all the manifold temptations of the corrupt city—to have suffered her to be seen, and to be ensnared by those gallants ever on the watch for defenceless beauty; and to contrast with their elegance of mien, and fatal flatteries—the grossness of the companions selected for her, and the unloving discomfort of the home into which she had been thrown. But now that St. John had appeared—that Helen's heart and fancy were

steeled alike against more dangerous temptation,—the object to be obtained from the pressing courtesy of Mrs. Mivers existed no more. The vengeance flowed into other channels.

The only other visitors at the house were John Ardworth and Gabriel Varney.

Madame Dalibard watched vigilantly the countenance and manner of Ardworth, when, after presenting him to Percival, she whispered—"I am glad you assured me as to your sentiments for Helen. She has found *there*, the lover you wished for her—'gay and handsome as herself.'"

And, in the sudden paleness that overspread Ardworth's face, in his compressed lips, and convulsive start, she read with unspeakable rage the untold secret of his heart—till the rage gave way to complacency at the thought that the last insult to her wrongs was spared her—that her son (as son she believed he was) could not now, at least, be the successful suitor of her loathed sister's loathed child. Her discovery, perhaps, confirmed her in her countenance to Percival's progressive wooing, and half reconciled her to the pangs it inflicted on herself.

At the first introduction, Ardworth had scarcely

glanced at Percival. He regarded him, but as the sleek flutterer in the sunshine of fortune. And for the idle, the gay, the fair, the well drest, and wealthy—the sturdy workman of his own rough way, felt something of the uncharitable disdain which the laborious *have not*s too usually entertain for the prosperous *haves*. But the moment the unwelcome intelligence of Madame Dalibard was conveyed to him, the smooth-faced boy swelled into dignity and importance.

Yet it was not merely as a rival, that that strong manly heart, after the first natural agony, regarded Percival. No, he looked upon him less with anger than with interest—as the one in whom Helen's happiness was henceforth to be invested. And to Madame Dalibard's astonishment, for this nature was wholly new to her experience, she saw him, even in that first interview, composing his rough face to smiles, smoothing his bluff imperious accents into courtesy, listening patiently, watching benignly, and at last thrusting his large hand frankly forth—gripping Percival's slender fingers in his own; and then, with an indistinct chuckle, that seemed half laugh and half groan, as if he did not dare to trust himself farther, he made his wonted

unceremonious nod, and strode hurriedly from the room.

But he came again, and again, almost daily, for about a fortnight; sometimes, without entering the house, he would join the young people in the garden, assist them with awkward hands in their playful work on the garden, or sit with them in the ivied bower; and, warming more and more each time he came, talk at last with the cordial frankness of an elder brother. There was no disguise in this—he began to love Percival—what would seem more strange to the superficial, to admire him. Genius has a quick perception of the moral qualities; genius which, differing thus from mere talent, is more allied to the heart than to the head, sympathizes genially with goodness. Ardworth respected that young, ingenuous, unpoluted mind: he himself felt better and purer in its atmosphere. Much of the affection he cherished for Helen passed thus beautifully and nobly into his sentiments for the one whom Helen not unworthily preferred. And they grew so fond of him? as the young and gentle ever will grow fond of genius—however rough—once admitted to its companionship!

Percival, by this time, had recalled to his mind, where he had first seen that strong-featured, dark-browed countenance, and he gaily reminded Ardworth of his discourtesy, on the brow of the hill which commanded the view of London. That reminiscence made his new friend writhe; for then, amidst all his ambitious visions of the future, he had seen Helen in the distance—the reward of every labour—the fairest star in his horizon. But he strove stoutly against the regret of the illusion lost: the *vivendi causæ* were left him still, and for the nymph that had glided from his clasp, he clung at least to the laurel that was left in her place. In the folds of his robust fortitude, Ardworth thus wrapped his secret. Neither of his young playmates suspected it. He would have disdained himself if he had so poisoned their pleasure. That he suffered when alone, much and bitterly, is not to be denied; but in that masculine and complete being, Love took but its legitimate rank, amidst the passions and cares of man. It soured no existence—it broke no heart—the wind swept some blossoms from the bough,

and tossed wildly the agitated branches from root to summit, but the trunk stood firm.

In some of these visits to Madame Dalibard's, Ardworth renewed with her the more private conversation which had so unsettled his past convictions as to his birth, and so disturbed the calm, strong currents of his mind. He was chiefly anxious to learn what conjectures Madame Dalibard had formed as to his parentage, and what ground there was for belief that he was near in blood to herself, or that he was born to a station less dependent on continuous exertion; but on these points the dark sibyl preserved an obstinate silence. She was satisfied with the hints she had already thrown out, and absolutely refused to say more till better authorized by the inquiries she had set on foot. Artfully, she turned from these topics of closer and more household interest, to those on which she had previously insisted—connected with the general knowledge of mankind, and the complicated science of practical life. To fire his genius, wing his energies, inflame his ambition above that slow, laborious drudgery to which he had linked the chances of his career, and which her fiery and rapid intellect was wholly

unable to comprehend—save as a waste of life for uncertain and distant objects—became her task. And she saw with delight that Ardworth listened to her more assentingly than he had done at first. In truth, the pain shut within his heart, the conflict waged keenly between his reason and his passion, unfitted him, for the time, for mere mechanical employment, in which his genius could afford him no consolation. Now, genius is given to man, not only to enlighten others, but to comfort as well as to elevate himself. Thus, in all the sorrows of actual existence, the man is doubly inclined to turn to his genius for distraction. Harassed in this world of action, he knocks at the gate of that world of idea or fancy which he is privileged to enter: he escapes from the clay to the spirit. And rarely, till some great grief comes, does the man in whom the celestial fire is lodged know all the gift of which he is possessed. At last, Ardworth's visits ceased abruptly. He shut himself up once more in his chambers; but the law books were laid aside.

Varney, who generally contrived to call when Ardworth was not there, seldom interrupted the lovers in their little paradise of the garden; but

he took occasion to ripen and cement his intimacy with Percival: sometimes walked, or, (if St. John had his cabriolet,) drove home and dined with him, *tête-à-tête* in Curzon-street; and as he made Helen his chief subject of conversation, Percival could not but esteem him amongst the most agreeable of men. With Helen, when Percival was not there, Varney held some secret conferences—secret even from Percival; two or three times, before the hour in which Percival was accustomed to come, they had been out together: and Helen's face looked more cheerful than usual on their return. It was not surprising that Gabriel Varney, so displeasing to a man like Ardworth, should have won little less favour with Helen than with Percival; for, to say nothing of an ease and suavity of manner which stole into the confidence of those in whom to confide was a natural propensity, his various acquisitions and talents, imposing, from the surface over which they spread, and the glitter which they made, had an inevitable effect upon a mind so susceptible as Helen's to admiration for art and respect for knowledge. But what chiefly conciliated her to Varney, whom she regarded, moreover, as her aunt's most intimate friend, was

that she was persuaded he was unhappy, and wronged by the world or fortune. Varney had a habit of so representing himself—of dwelling with a bitter eloquence—which his natural malignity made forcible—on the injustice of the world to superior intellect. He was a great accuser of Fate. It is the illogical weakness of some evil natures to lay all their crimes, and the consequences of crime, upon *Destiny*. There was a heat, a vigour, a rush of words, and a readiness of strong, if trite, imagery in what Varney said, that deceived the young into the monstrous error that he was an enthusiast—misanthropical, perhaps, but only so from enthusiasm. How could Helen, whose slightest thought, when a star broke forth from the cloud, or a bird sung suddenly from the copse, had more of wisdom and of poetry than all Varney's gaudy and painted seemings ever could even mimic,—how *could* she be so deceived? Yet so it was. Here stood a man whose youth she supposed had been devoted to refined and elevating pursuits, gifted, neglected, disappointed, solitary, and unhappy. She saw little beyond. You had but to touch her pity to win her interest, and to excite her trust. Of anything farther,

even had Percival never existed, she could not have dreamed. It was because a secret and undefinable repugnance, in the midst of pity, trust, and friendship, put Varney altogether out of the light of a possible lover, that all those sentiments were so easily kindled. This repugnance arose not from the disparity between their years alone; it was rather that nameless uncongeniality, which does not forbid friendship but is irreconcilable with love. To do Varney justice, he never offered to reconcile the two. Not for love did he secretly confer with Helen—not for love did his heart beat against the hand which reposed so carelessly on his fatal arm.

CHAPTER X.

THE RATTLE OF THE SNAKE.

THE progress of affection between natures like those of Percival and Helen, favoured by free and constant intercourse, was naturally rapid. It was scarcely five weeks from the day he had first seen Helen, and he already regarded her as his plighted bride. During the earlier days of his courtship, Percival, enamoured and absorbed for the first time in his life, did not hasten to make his mother the *confidante* of his happiness. He had written but twice; and though he said briefly, in the second letter, that he had discovered two relations, both interesting, and one charming, he had deferred naming them, or entering into detail. This, not alone from that indescribable coyness which all

have experienced in addressing even those with whom they are most intimate, in the early, half-unrevealed, and mystic emotions of first love ; but because Lady Mary's letters had been so full of her sister's declining health, of her own anxieties and fears, that he had shrunk from giving her a new subject of anxiety ; and a confidence, full of hope and joy, seemed to him unfeeling and unseasonable. He knew how necessarily uneasy and restless an avowal that his heart was seriously engaged to one she had never seen, would make that tender mother ; and that his confession would rather add to her cares, than produce sympathy with his transports. But now, feeling impatient for his mother's assent to the formal proposals which had become due to Madame Dalibard and Helen, and taking advantage of the letter last received from her, which gave more cheering accounts of her sister, and expressed curiosity for further explanation as to his half disclosure, he wrote at length, and cleared his breast of all its secrets. It was the same day in which he wrote this confession, and pleaded his cause, that we accompany him to the house of his sweet mistress, and leave him by her side, in the accustomed garden. Within,

Madame Dalibard, whose chair was set by the window, bent over certain letters, which she took, one by one, from her desk, and read slowly, lifting her eyes from time to time, and glancing towards the young people, as they walked, hand in hand, round the small demesnes, now hid by the fading foliage, now emerging into view. Those letters were the early love-epistles of William Mainwaring. She had not recurred to them for years. Perhaps she now felt that food necessary to the sustainment of her fiendish designs. It was a strange spectacle, to see this being, so full of vital energy, mobile and restless as a serpent; condemned to that helpless decrepitude, chained to the uneasy seat—not as in the resigned and passive imbecility of extreme age, but rather as one whom, in the prime of life, the rack has broken, leaving the limbs inert, the mind active, the form as one dead, the heart with superabundant vigour;—a cripple's impotence, and a Titan's will! What, in that dreary imprisonment, and amidst the silence she habitually preserved, passed through the caverns of that breast, one can no more conjecture, than one can count the blasts that sweep and rage through the hollows of impenetrable

rock, or the elements that conflict in the bosom of the volcano, everlastingly at work. She had read, and replaced the letters, and, leaning her cheek on her hand, was gazing vacantly on the wall, when Varney intruded on that dismal solitude.

He closed the door after him, with more than usual care; and, drawing a seat close to Lucretia's, said, "*Belle mère*, the time has arrived for *you* to act—my part is well-nigh closed."

"Ay!" said Lucretia, wearily; "what is the news you bring?"

"First," replied Varney, and, as he spoke, he shut the window, as if his whisper could possibly be heard without—"first, all this business connected with Helen is at length arranged. You know when, agreeably to your permission, I first suggested to her, as it were casually, that you were so reduced in fortune, that I trembled to regard your future,—that you had years ago sacrificed nearly half your pecuniary resources to maintain her parents—she of herself reminded me that she was entitled, when of age, to a sum far exceeding all her wants, and——"

"That I might be a pensioner on the child of William Mainwaring and Susan Mivers," inter-

rupted Lucretia. "I know that, and thank her not. Pass on."

"And you know, too, that in the course of my conversation with the girl, I let out also incidentally that, even so, you were dependent on the chances of her life; that if she died, (and youth itself is mortal, before she was of age,) the sum left her by her grandfather would revert to her father's family; and so, by hints, I drew her on to ask if there was no mode by which, in case of her death, she might ensure subsistence to you. So that you see the whole scheme was made at her own prompting. I did but, as a man of business, suggest the means—an insurance on her life."

"Varney, these details are hateful. I do not doubt that you have done all to forestal inquiry and elude risk. The girl has insured her life to the amount of her fortune?"

"To that amount only! Pooh! Her death will buy more than that! As no single office will insure for more than 5000*l.*, and as it was easy to persuade her that such offices were liable to failure, and that it was usual to insure in several, and for a larger amount than the sum desired, I got her to enter herself at three of the principal

offices. The amount paid to us on her death will be fifteen thousand pounds. It will be paid, (and here I have followed the best legal advice,) in trust to me for your benefit. Hence, therefore, even if our researches fail us, if no son of yours can be found, with sufficient evidence to prove, against the keen interests and bought advocates of heirs-at-law, the right to Laughton, this girl will repay us well, will replace what I have taken, at the risk of my neck, perhaps—certainly at the risk of the hulks, from the capital of my uncle's legacy—will refund what we have spent on the inquiry—and the residue will secure to you an independence sufficing for your wants almost for life, and to me, what will purchase with economy" (and Varney smiled) "a year or so of a gentleman's idle pleasures. Are you satisfied thus far?"

"She will die happy and innocent!" muttered Lucretia, with the growl of demoniac disappointment.

"Will you wait, then, till my forgery is detected, and I have no power to buy the silence of the trustees—wait till I am in prison, and on a trial for life and death? Reflect, every day, every hour of delay, is fraught with peril. But if my

safety is nothing compared to the refinement of your revenge, will you wait till Helen marries Percival St. John. You start! But can you suppose that this innocent love-play will not pass rapidly to its *dénouement*? It is but yesterday that Percival confided to me, that he should write this very day to his mother, and communicate all his feelings and his hopes;—that he waited but her assent, to propose formally for Helen. Now one of two things must happen. Either this mother, haughty and vain as lady mothers mostly are, may refuse consent to her son's marriage with the daughter of a disgraced banker, and the niece of that Lucretia Dalibard whom her husband would not admit beneath his roof——”

“ Hold, sir !” exclaimed Lucretia, haughtily, and amidst all the passions that darkened her countenance and degraded her soul, some flash of her ancestral spirit shot across her brow ; but it passed quickly, and she added, with fierce composure——“ You are right ; go on !”

“ Either—and pardon me for an insult that comes not from me—either this will be the case ; Lady Mary St. John will hasten back in alarm to London ; she exercises extraordinary control over

her son ; she may withdraw him from us altogether, from me as well as you, and the occasion now presented to us may be lost (who knows?) for ever ; or she may be a weak and fond woman, —may be detained in Italy by her sister's illness, —may be anxious that the last lineal descendant of the St. Johns should marry betimes ; and, moved by her darling's prayers, may consent at once to the union. Or a third course, which Percival thinks the most probable, and which, though most unwelcome to us of all, I had well nigh forgotten, may be adopted. She may come to England, and, in order to judge her son's choice with her own eyes, may withdraw Helen from your roof to hers. At all events, delays are dangerous —dangerous, putting aside my personal interest, and regarding only your own object—may bring to our acts new and searching eyes—may cut us off from the habitual presence either of Percival, or Helen, or both ; or surround them, at the first breath of illness, with prying friends, and formidable precautions. The birds now are in our hands. Why then open the cage and bid them fly, in order to spread the net ? This morning all

the final documents with the Insurance Companies are completed. It remains for me but to pay the first quarterly premiums. For that I think I am prepared, without drawing farther on your hoards or my own scanty resources, which Grabman will take care to drain fast enough."

"And Percival St. John?" said Madame Dalibard. "We want no idle sacrifices. If my son be *not* found, we need not that boy's ghost amongst those who haunt us."

"Surely not," said Varney; "and for my part, he may be more useful to me alive than dead. There is no insurance on *his* life, and a rich friend (credulous green-horn that he is!) is scarcely of that flock of geese which it were wise to slay from the mere hope of a golden egg. Percival St. John is your victim, not mine—not till you give the order, would I lift a finger to harm him."

"Yes, let him live, unless my son be found to me," said Madame Dalibard, almost exultingly; "let him live to forget yon fair-faced fool, leaning now, see you, so delightedly on his arm, and fancying eternity in the hollow vows of love!—let him live to wrong and abandon her by forgetfulness, though even in the grave; to laugh at his

boyish dreams—to sully her memory in the arms of harlots! Oh, if the dead can suffer, let him live, that she may feel beyond the grave his inconstancy and his fall! Methinks that that thought will comfort me, if Vincent be no more, and I stand childless in the world!”

“It is so settled, then,” said Varney, ever ready to clench the business that promised gold, and relieve his apprehensions of the detection of his fraud. “And now to your noiseless hands, as soon as may be, I consign the girl: she has lived long enough!”

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND INNOCENCE.

WHILE this the conference between these execrable and ravening birds of night and prey, Helen and her boy-lover were thus conversing in the garden, while the autumn sun—for it was in the second week of October—broke pleasantly through the yellowing leaves of the tranquil shrubs, and the flowers, which should have died with the gone summer, still fresh by their tender care, despite the lateness of the season, smiled gratefully as their light footsteps passed.

“Yes, Helen,” said Percival—“yes, you will love my mother, for she is one of those people who seem to attract love, as if it were a property belonging to them. Even my dog Beau (you

know how fond Beau is of *me* !) always nestles at *her* feet, when we are at home. I own she has pride, but it is a pride that never offended any one. You know there are some flowers that we call *proud*. The pride of the flower is not more harmless than my mother's. But perhaps pride is not the right word—it is rather the aversion to anything low or mean, the admiration for everything pure and high. Ah, how that very pride, if pride it be, will make her love you, my Helen !”

“ You need not tell me,” said Helen, smiling seriously, “ that I shall love your mother, I love her already—nay, from the first moment you said you *had* a mother, my heart leaped to her. Your mother ! if ever you are really jealous, it must be of her ! but that she should love me,—that it is what I doubt and fear. For if you were my brother, Percival, I should be so ambitious for you. A nymph must rise from the stream, a sylphid from the rose, before I could allow another to steal you from my side. And if I think I should feel this only as your sister, what can be precious enough to satisfy a mother ?”

“ You, and you only,” answered Percival, with his blithesome laugh—“ you, my sweet Helen,

much better than nymph or sylphid, about whom, between ourselves, I never cared three straws, even in a poem. How pleased you will be with Laughton! Do you know, I was lying awake all last night, to consider what room you would like best for your own. And at last, I have decided—come, listen—it opens from the music-gallery that overhangs the hall. From the window, you overlook the southern side of the park, and catch a view of the lake beyond. There are two niches in the wall—one for your piano, one for your favourite books. It is just large enough to hold four persons with ease—*our* mother and myself, your aunt, whom by that time we shall have petted into good humour, and if we can coax Ardworth there—the best good fellow that ever lived—I think our party will be complete. By the way, I am uneasy about Ardworth, it is so long since we have seen him; I have called three times—nay, five—but his odd-looking clerk always swears he is not at home. Tell me, Helen, now, you who know him so well—tell me, how I can serve him! You know, I am so terribly rich, (at least, I shall be in a month or two;)—I can never get through my money, unless my friends will help me. And

is it not shocking that that noble fellow should be so poor, and yet suffer me to call him 'friend,' as if, in friendship one man should want everything, and the other nothing. Still, I don't know how to venture to propose—come, you understand me, Helen—let us lay our wise heads together, and make him well off, in spite of himself."

It was in this loose, boyish talk of Percival's, that he had found the way not only to Helen's heart, but to her soul. For in this, she (grand undeveloped poetess) recognised a nobler poetry than we chain to rhythm—the poetry of generous deeds. She yearned to kiss the warm hand she held, and drew nearer to his side as she answered—"And sometimes, dear, dear Percival, you wonder why I would rather listen to you than to all Mr. Varney's bitter eloquence, or even to my dear cousin's aspiring ambition. They talk well, but it is of themselves; while you——"

Percival blushed, and checked her.

"Well," she said—"well, to your question. Alas! you know little of my cousin, if you think all our arts could decoy him out of his rugged independence, and, much as I love him, I could not wish it. But do not fear for him; he is one

of those who are born to succeed, and without help."

"How do you know that, pretty prophetess?" said Percival, with the superior air of manhood. "I have seen more of the world than you have, and I cannot see why Ardworth should *succeed* as you call it;—or if so, why he should succeed less if he swung his hammock in a better berth than that hole in Gray's Inn, and would just let me keep him a cab and a groom."

Had Percival talked of keeping John Ardworth an elephant and a palanquin, Helen could not have been more amused. She clapped her little hands in a delight that provoked Percival, and laughed out loud. Then seeing her boy-lover's lip pouted petulantly, and his brow was overcast, she said more seriously—

"Do you not know what it is to feel convinced of something which you cannot explain? Well, I feel this as to my cousin's fame and fortunes. Surely, too, you must feel it, you scarce know why, when he speaks of that future, which seems so dim and so far to *me*, as of something that belonged to him."

"Very true, Helen," said Percival, "he lays it.

out like the map of his estate. One can't laugh when he says so carelessly—'At such an age I shall lead my circuit—at such an age I shall be rich—at such an age I shall enter parliament—and beyond that I shall look as yet no farther.' And, poor fellow, then he will be forty-three!—forty-three! How very, very old! And in the meanwhile to suffer such privations!"

"There are no privations to one who lives in the future," said Helen, with that noble intuition into lofty natures, which at times flashed from her childish simplicity, foreshowing what, if Heaven spare her life, her maturer intellect may develope: "For Ardworth there is no such thing as poverty. He is as rich in his hopes as we are in——" She stopped short, blushed; and continued with downcast looks—"As well might you pity me in these walks, so dreary without you. I do not live in them—I live in my thoughts of you."

Her voice trembled with emotion in those last words. She slid from Percival's arm, and timidly sate down (and he beside her) on a little mound under the single chesnut tree, that threw its shade over the garden.

Both were silent for some moments—Percival

with grateful ecstasy—Helen with one of those sudden fits of mysterious melancholy, to which her nature was so subjected.

He was the first to speak. “Helen,” he said, gravely, “since I have known you, I feel as if life were a more solemn thing than I ever regarded it before. It seems to me as if a new and more arduous duty were added to those for which I was prepared—a duty, Helen, to become worthy of you! Will you smile? No—you will not smile, if I say I have had my brief moments of ambition. Sometimes as a boy, with Plutarch in my hand, stretched idly under the old cedar trees at Laughton—sometimes as a sailor, when, becalmed on the Atlantic, and my ears freshly filled with tales of Collingwood and Nelson, I stole from my comrades, and leant, musingly, over the boundless sea. But when this ample heritage passed to me—when I had no more my own fortunes to make, my own rank to build up,—such dreams became less and less frequent. Is it not true that wealth makes us contented to be obscure? Yes; I understand, while I speak, why poverty itself befriends, not cripples, Ardworth’s energies. But since I have known you, dearest Helen, those

dreams return more vividly than ever. He who claims you should be—must be—something nobler than the crowd! Helen!"—and he rose by an irresistible and restless impulse—"I shall not be contented till you are as proud of your choice as I of mine!"

It seemed, as Percival spoke and looked, as if boyhood were cast from him for ever. The unusual weight and gravity of his words, to which his tone gave even eloquence—the steady flash of his dark eyes—his erect, elastic form—all had the dignity of man. Helen gazed on him silently, and with a heart so full, that words would not come, and tears overflowed instead.

That sight sobered him at once—he knelt down beside her, threw his arms round her—it was his first embrace—and kissed the tears away.

"How have I distressed you?—why do you weep?"

"Let me weep on, Percival, dear Percival! These tears are like prayers—they speak to Heaven—and of you!"

"Oh!" she resumed, recovering herself at length, "if, as sometimes even when you are with me, a cold and nameless foreboding seems to whisper

—if I am not reserved for so much happiness—if I cannot partake your fate—if we are divided !”

“ What can divide us ?” exclaimed Percival, in passionate alarm. Helen sighed heavily, and meekly bowing her head, murmured, “ Does not the same holy ground hold the altar and the grave ? If I should go before you, Percival, think that I see you still, think that the same bright destinies still await you—think that he who would so nobly aspire to be worthy a human love, has still to be worthy God !”

She laid her hand on his as she ceased, its touch was cold, and the chill pierced to his heart, the tears were dry upon her cheeks, but they still glittered in the eyes that were raised devoutly upward. He would have spoken, but his voice failed him. Something of her forebodings passed into his own heart. And while thus silent, a step came noiselessly over the grass, and between them and the sunlight, stood Gabriel Varney.

END OF VOL. II.

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